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The

OBSERVATORY

..... by the Editor

WE HAVE an idea you will find that this issue is one of the best you've read in a long time. The reason, of course, being a couple of guys named Rog Phillips, Alexander Blade, Craig Browning, Charles Recour and so on . . .

WE'LL take Rog Phillips first: he's written a story which certainly has the most unusual title we've ever seen. It's called "M'Bong-Ah." If that isn't unusual, we'd like to see one with a better mystery attached to it! But you'll find the mystery explained in detail in the story itself, and again, we've never read a more unusual story. We won't tell you what M'Bong-Ah means. You'll find out soon enough in the story—and when you do find out, you are in for some very fancy reading and entertainment.

NEXT is Alexander Blade's "The Insane Planet." This is a science fiction story to end all science fiction stories! What happens in this story shouldn't happen to you! You'll agree heartily when you find out what happens on the insane planet. Just let your imagination run riot and sit back to enjoy one of the top stories of the month.

MANY of you will remember Lefty Baker, that irrepressible crackpot who is always having the most amazing adventures. Well, this month Lefty starts out in an insane asylum and winds up there—but he's happy about the whole thing because in between he runs into a professor and a couple of rabbits. The catch is that the rabbits are immortal, and you can plainly see that such a condition can easily lead to confusion! Anyway, read on, and prepare for a lot of belly-laughs and a lot of excitement.

"LUNAR Legacy" is the title of Charles Recour's unusual little short about—yep, a legacy left on a satellite! Well, the title gives away enough, so we won't spoil your fun any more by telling you the rest of it in advance. But maybe the title doesn't give away too much at that! As you'll see . . .

ONCE in a while we get one of those mysterious stories that has a surprise ending which you ought to have seen, but didn't. If you guess the ending to this story beforehand, you're just a pretty smart reader, that's all. Anyway, we guarantee you'll like this little character story, and its moods and inferences. It's more on the weird side, but the science of the human mind is certainly weird enough! Title: "Half-Way Street."

LESTER Barclay gives us a fantasy titled "The Venomous Girdle." This is a very old tomato of an idea—but that's what makes the story good; this idea is time-tested and true. Of course, Barclay has given it an unusual new treatment, and we think you'll be pleased with it. It all began when—but let Barclay tell it, he does it so much better than we could!

THE Club House, our fan column, seems to continue its popularity, and you'll find a very generous amount of space devoted to it again this month.

OUR mutual friend, Edie Korsbak has done another science fiction fan service by putting out another science fiction novel in book form. This time it's "Slaves of Sleep" by L. Ron Hubbard. We have read it and it's really very fine. As a fan project, it's a marvelous job, and a real service to science fiction. His address, if you're interested, is 5525 Blackstone, Chicago. And speaking of fan activities, Dick Shaver writes saying he still has a few copies of his "I Remember Lemuria" left on hand. His address is Box 74, Rt. 2, Lily Lake, McHenry, Ill.

REMEMBER the time this column predicted a space ship would be seen in America very soon? Well, that came true with the Alabama appearance of a two-stories high ship with square windows. Now, without a prediction coming up, we'll try to put another on the hooks. We predict that the atom bomb will be used in Asia in 1949, and that some extreme excitement will sweep the world as a result. We are enabled to do this by a very handsome crystal ball sent us by an unidentified reader. We appreciate the gift enormously. It works better than television! *Rap*

HEAVENLY RADAR



By



CHARLES WELLINGTON SULLY

RADIO professionals and amateurs, since the mid nineteen-twenties have noticed peculiar, patternless, static that apparently originates in the sky. Of course it is common knowledge that interference from the sky is a known thing—witness the disturbances in radio reception due to sunspots—but this interference which was noticed, but about which nothing was done, came from the stars!

It is only recently with the advent of radar, direction-finding radio apparatus, and large movable antennas, that anything has been done about it. Curiously enough, the greatest exploration of celestial radio radiation seems to have been done by an engineer who is both a professional and an amateur. This young man lives in Illinois and lately has been the recipient of a great deal of publicity from private and professional sources.

Some years ago he became interested in the phenomena of heavenly radiation when he found that his receivers were picking up strange signals. The signals formed no recognizable pattern, but seemed to be in the form of static bursts, that is, formless voltages were induced in his receiving antennas. Because the measurable frequency of the radio waves seemed to be moderately short, he was able to construct an antenna of reasonable size, one that could be mounted in such a fashion that it could be pointed in any direction. By experimenting with this crude antenna, the engineer learned a good deal about this strange radiation—at least about its frequency and direction and intensity.

It was extremely feeble and it required the most sensitive type of radio receiver to detect it. Never-the-less, he managed to do so. He studied it quite awhile, but it was only in the past few years that it came to the attention of the people most likely to be interested in such radiation, namely, the astronomers, and astrophysicists. And through their intervention, with the help of the government, much more work is being done.

Radar experts have also noticed this mysterious radio emanation from the sky, and at first were of the opinion that it was reflection from the Kennelly-Heaviside layers, but subsequent study of it, proved that that was not the case at all.

RECENTLY, special radar equipment for the recording and plotting of this radio emanation has been devised and various professionals and amateurs have assisted in its study. The government went so far as to provide an especially suitable receiving antenna for it—captured from the Germans.

All along the coast of France and Germany during the war, the Germans had erected numerous radar installations, among the commonest of which was an early-warning, moderate frequency radar, known as the "Wurzburger" from the name of the town where it was manufactured. These antennas are parabolic, metal-mesh types, about thirty feet in diameter and mounted on special platforms so that they may be rotated to cover the sky. Because of their size, they are especially suited to the examination of this mysterious radiation.

It is interesting to speculate upon what will be found. We know that the waves coming from space, are ordinarily electromagnetic waves no different in substance than any radio wave. Where do they originate? How intense are they? What causes them?

It is not possible to say that the radio waves are caused by the creation or the destruction of matter for it is a known fact that this does not produce radiation of such a huge wave-length, comparatively speaking.

It may be that the waves are caused by some "person or persons unknown" attempting to communicate with us from space. That this does not seem probable is born out by the fact that apparently the radio waves do not originate in our solar system, though this is not yet a definite fact.

It is not impossible that they may be caused by something or someone trying to communicate with us. If so, time will tell us the answer.

Right now, innumerable technicians are devising apparatus to further explore this weird radiation. One thing is evidently true; the radiation does not come from the Earth! Another thing is certain—no such radiation is ever found in nature or in natural phenomena! This tends to make us believe that it is generated by intelligent beings, but it is of course, too early to draw specific conclusions.

Until some intelligence or some evidence of modulation is discerned in the received waves, we had best stop the speculating. It's much too impressive!



M'Bong-Ah

by Rog Phillips

"**M'**BONG-AH." The word rose above the medley of voices, murmurs, juke box music, and the noisy rattling of the ancient ventilation fan. Whoever had uttered the syllables had raised his voice only then, for after the word was uttered there remained only the other sounds,

blended into what some writer had once called the sonar atmosphere—the peculiar sonar atmosphere of the space port waiting room with its bar, lunch counter, dining tables, and a motley assortment of humans.

At the sound of the word, the old man sitting at the bar half asleep over

Such beauty had never been seen on Earth or Venus! Then incredible things began to happen—and beauty became horror

a glass of stale beer, opened his rheumy eyes and lifted his head. His unkempt beard and tobacco-stained mustache, as they lifted from the cradle of his arm crooked on the counter, were in character with his dirt- and sweat- stained suit and his worn out shoes.

He raised the half empty glass and

drank the stale liquid slowly, leaving glistening drops hanging onto his mustache after he set the glass down.

His washed-out eyes peered into the mirror wall back of the bar, slowly surveying the huge waiting room, as if by a mere inspection he could locate the origin of the sound.

There was the usual assortment of tourists—wealthy men and their families, wealthy bachelors and their secretaries, not so wealthy vacationers who had stinted for years so that they could take a trip to Mars or Venus or just to the moon and back.

Over along the far wall was a table of men in uniforms. From the shoulder insignia they were cadet officers, probably from the army scow that the flight schedule board said would take off at five o'clock, three hours hence.

While the old man watched them, the same voice lifted above the sonar atmosphere. It belonged to a flawless, scrubbed-red face of one of the cadet officers at that table.

The old man pushed himself off the high counter stool and shuffled through the tables in the general direction of the young man. He came to a stop when he got within hearing distance, his eyes looking through the plate glass wall of the room onto the tarmac, his ears listening through their protection of uncut, dirty-white hair. His slow mind soon began to pick up the meanings of the words brought to it by his ears.

"This will be a real chance to test out the theory I used as the basis for my graduation thesis," the young man was saying. "The effect of continued sound patterns as a hypnotic. The Department thinks I might be able to discover something that would account for the higher percentage of space madness on some ships than on others. My theory is different than anything they have tried so far."

"Then you really think," another young cadet said, "that the ordinary sounds on a space ship can produce madness?"

"Not in themselves," the first young man corrected. "Let's put it this way. Everything that enters your mind is associated with something else, for the

most part subconsciously. Here's a hypothetical example: when you were four years old something very disagreeable to you took place. While it was taking place, a woman down the street was playing something on the piano. Consciously you were not aware of her playing the piano, or of even hearing any sound at all. Your mind was centered on this horrifying incident, whatever it was, and your emotion was overwhelmingly one of fear, intense fear.

"For the rest of your life, piano music has a strange effect on you. It produces unreasoning fear. You can't stand the sound of a piano. Now, when you are grown up, if by chance someone played the same music on the piano that was being played then, you would suddenly become unbalanced."

"I get it," the second young man said, excitedly. "You think that there may be sounds on the ships that bring out hidden associations with actual events of the past."

"Partly that," the first young man said. "But that is a generally accepted fact of psychology. What I am mainly interested in finding are sounds that are hypnotic *in themselves*. That is my contention—that there are some sounds which, if continued for days at a time, will drive a man insane. That there are other sounds which, if continued that way, will produce other psychological effects. I class them as purely hypnotic sonars, and . . ."

HIS eyes fixed themselves on the old man standing near him. The old man was now looking directly at him. The first reaction of disgust at the old man's unkempt appearance was quickly replaced by curiosity.

The old man, seeing that he had gained the attention of the young officer, seemed about to retreat, but then

in the momentary conversational silence which followed, he stepped closer to the table.

"Your conversation interests me," he said, his voice coming through his stain streaked beard in low, apologetic tones.

"Oh, it does," the young man said, smiling humorously at his several companion cadets. "And why, may I ask?" He sensed a bit of fun that might pass the time before they had to embark.

The old man glanced questioningly at the one vacant chair at the table.

"Sit down, by all means, sir," the young cadet invited, the sign of respect intended as a subtle insult. "Sit down and tell me why my conversation interests you. I'll buy you a beer." This last was an impulse dictated by his better instincts.

"Thank you, young man," the old one said, surprise in his voice. He sat down, carefully wiping his mustache with his dusty sleeve in a useless attempt at a belated toilet. He looked timidly from one young face to another, and there was something in his life-dimmed eyes. Regret? A soul gnawing hunger for human companionship and respect? There was no way of knowing.

The waiter appeared in answer to the young man's signal, then departed for the bottle of beer.

The young cadet winked at his companions.

"Your talk of sound as a hypnotic," the old man began hesitantly, "made me think that perhaps you might be interested in an incident in my life." He waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal of the importance of anything about his life.

"It isn't important now," he went on. "I doubt if anyone would even care to listen to an old man and the story of his life, especially one like me; but you are in search of something, and—and it

is possible I might help you find it with this story."

"Fire away," the cadet said, grinning. "We'll have to listen to each other's voices for months on this trip. Perhaps it will be a relief to have the memory of yours to turn to in our moments of despair."

The waiter brought the bottle of beer. The old man poured some in the accompanying glass with shaking fingers. He took a deep swallow and then set the glass down.

"You may not believe it," he said, "but once, long ago, when I was as young as you are now, I sat at this very table." His finger pointed to a cadet whose chair was tipped back against the wall, one foot hooked onto the edge of the table. "It was right where you are sitting," he said. "Oh, the uniform was different then. So was the ship I was waiting to embark in. And I wasn't a cadet, really, though every man in government service then would be classed as a cadet by today's standards. You could get all the men who had ever left the Earth into this waiting room. All the women, too."

THE old man stopped talking, his mind traveling into the past. From the dark reaches of memory a vast sea of prostrate, indigo skinned, naked humans were humming, humming, mmmmm. Crashing into the monotone of their low hum of worship came the sound of a hundred temple gongs, all hit at the same instant, then silenced at a signal by some unseen underpriest. And as the thunderous BONG came to an abrupt end, the sea of voices ascended in a sigh as of a thousand winds. Aaahhhh.

Once again he could see the eight foot tall, indigo skinned monarch, standing erect on the dais before his jeweled throne where he had suddenly appeared

at the sound of the gongs—baughty, regal in bearing, savage nostrils flaring like a wild stallion's, his ruby studded headdress sparkling crimson in the sun's rays as they crept over the high peaks of Sierra Corscateh, filtered to feeble impotence by the eternal cloud layer over Venus.

In memory he was seeing it again. He alone of all the people on Earth had actually seen it, and he only the once. Yet the sound of it as it crept through the Venusian jungles was a legendary horror. Many had heard it and shuddered as it died down, to be replaced by the crackling, growling sounds of the jungle. MmmmmMMMBONG-aahhh!

The young man was shaking his shoulder.

"Hey, old man," he was saying. "Wake up. You promised us a story for your beer. You might at least drink the beer before you go to sleep."

"Beer? Story?" The old man looked vacantly at the young faces before him.

Retreating into the dim depths of his memory was the nightmare of darting, stealthy patches of indigo skin slipping through the dim shadows of the jungle, the distant, stepped-up chant of the savage horde, carrying their temple gongs as shields. MmBong-aahh, m'bong-ah, mbongah, mbongah-mbongahmbongahmbongah. Heartless, soulless, alien, bestial.

The old man dipped his tobacco-stained mustache into the sudsy foam of his beer, and the nightmare memory retreated all the way. His mind cleared.

He began talking, his voice so low that the young cadet spacemen had to lean closer and closer to hear what he said. So close that perhaps they could hear it too, the eternal sound of the Venusian torture drum, faint, ever so faint, yet always there, in his mind.

* * *

"HOLD up a minute, Ben. Where d'you think you're going in such a hurry?"

Ben turned at the sound of the voice. He saw Fred Larkins taking long strides to catch up with him, a broad smile on his tanned face.

"Good morning, Fred," Ben greeted warmly. "Have to go up to G.H.Q. The old man told me to report there this morning for a special assignment."

"When did he tell you that?" Fred asked, falling into step beside Ben.

"Last night. Jean and I took in a show and dance. When we got back her father was still up, working on reports of some kind."

"Well," Fred chuckled dryly. "With you after the old man's daughter and having the inside track, you can be sure that he'll give you something eventually leading to a job like his."

"You're jealous," Ben laughed. "Anyway, you know as well as I do that there isn't a man in the outfit that wouldn't go for her, even if she were the daughter of the local grocer."

"That's the truth," Fred sighed. "How such a dried up old army bigwig could be the father of such a delectable lovable mouse is more than they can tell you in the books on genetics."

The two men walked for several yards in silence. They were members of the newest branch of the unarmy (United Nations Armed Forces). With the successful return of the first space ship from Venus a brief year before, the nations of the world had pooled their resources to build a space armada. Along with the actual construction of the ships, they had authorized the U.N. to create a special branch for the training of men for space flight. All this on the strength of one successful round trip to Venus.

The results of that flight were top secret. Rumors had run the gamut of

fantasy. Yet, no one seemed to know exactly what that ship had brought back in the way of space flight data, or specimens and pictures from Venus itself.

Benjamin Arnold and Frederick Larkins were two of the twenty-odd thousand officers transferred to the new branch six months previously. During the six months, they had learned the principles of space navigation, the elements of astronomy, and a hundred small skills that the higher-ups thought were essential to the training of space officers.

There had been hints that at the end of six months basic training the men would be divided up into teams of specialists, each section concentrating on some phase of this top secret. It was taken for granted that the whole program was aimed at eventually going back to Venus. Why it would take over twenty thousand officers and their necessary complement of nearly a million and a half men, was one of those questions one thought about but never asked.

NOW Ben was on his way to receive special assignment. He left Fred at the entrance to the huge armory, promising to come out and tell him all about it unless he was sworn to secrecy.

His leather heels beat a loud crescendo on the marble floor of the huge lobby of the armory, the sound echoing hollowly from the vast arches of the roof above. He took the wide, shallow steps that led to the G.H.Q. offices and unerringly headed toward the right door, a gigantic bronze affair that opened into the smaller hallways between the private offices of the legendary G.H.Q. staff.

He hesitated only for a moment before the door whose frosted glass exterior bore the legend "Gen. G. H.

Green." Then he opened the door and entered.

A trim WAC took his name and asked him to be seated. He sat, back stiff, and waited. An hour passed during which many bigwigs came and left, ignoring him. The WAC looked over at him curiously now and then. Regulations were very strict, however, and she did not invite conversation.

Ben stole her an occasional look, admiring the firm tilt of her chin, the blond loveliness of her hair, the inviting curves of her trim body that even the unarmy uniform could not hide. He told his conscience that it was only to pass the time. And anyway, Jean was infinitely more desirable in every way.

Finally, she looked his way and told him he could go in. Jean's father, General Green, advanced to shake hands with him as he entered the inner office.

Ben lifted his eyebrows in surprise at the reception. Something unusual must be up.

His surmise proved to be right. In half an hour he had learned several things the world outside would have given much to know.

For one, that here on Earth there was a genuine, real life Venusian, a woman. Really a girl. There was no way of knowing how old she was because Venusians did not reckon time, had no conception of it to the extent of measuring years.

Ben then received his new assignment, which was to learn to speak and understand Venusian language.

The essential facts of the mysterious Venus voyage came out slowly. It had been learned that Venus keeps one face eternally toward the sun, just as the moon does toward the Earth. Her surface was covered with vast oceans. On the sunward side, these oceans steamed

and boiled, sending upward vast clouds of vapor. These encircled the planet and precipitated on its dark side as rain, then flowed in steady ocean currents back to the sunward side again.

There were three continental land masses on Venus, all inhabited by a race of very fierce savages, entirely human in appearance except for their skin coloring which was a bright indigo. The crew of the ship had tried unsuccessfully to make friends with the natives. Nowhere had they been welcomed.

TOWARD the last of their exploration, they had surprised and captured the one Venusian, a girl. Until recently, no progress had been made in winning her friendship. Loneliness had finally forced her to become tractable. Progress was being made in learning the meanings of the words of her language. The experts were making recordings of her voice. These would be used to teach the language to a select group.

Ben was one of the chosen few for this job.

General Green impressed on him the importance of keeping it all strictly secret. If the world got an inkling of the fact that a live Venusian was on Earth, not even the entire unarmy could keep them from seeing her. That would bring back her stubborn wild nature and prevent any further progress.

If there was to be any hope of making friendly advances toward the Venusian savages, it was imperative that there be a group of officers thoroughly proficient in the language.

Ben left the office overjoyed at his good luck. The first part of his assignment was to see technicolor pictures of the Venus terrain, and several minutes of closeups of the Venus girl, taken

with concealed cameras in the place where she was kept.

The movie session would not begin until two o'clock, and it was just eleven when he left General Green's office. Fred was still waiting outside the building. "From the look of anticipation in your eyes, there must be a woman in it some place, Ben," he said shrewdly.

"Sorry, Fred," Ben said gloatingly. "Top secret, old boy. Can't divulge even a hint, you know."

"Ain't it always that way!" Fred groaned. "Well, how about a drink at the local faucet. There'll just be time before mess."

"Just a short one," Ben agreed. "I'm going to have a weighty afternoon."

THE lights in the small theatre room darkened and the screen lit up. There were only twenty men there, all well acquainted with one another. None of them had known that any of the others were to be present until they had been admitted to the room and faced one another.

The first picture to flash on the screen was a closeup of Venus itself. The commentator's voice stated that it had been taken from a distance of about fifteen thousand miles.

It was in color, remarkably clear cut as to detail. The slow movements of the cloud blanket could be discerned: reds, blues, and whites showing faint indications of the stratospheric currents.

There was a darker spot moving slowly across the surface of the planet. This, the commentator said, was not a physical prominence as had been thought by astronomers in their early observations of Venus, but was a vortex, a giant whirlwind. Its centrifugal force kept the light colored vapors out of its center, leaving the dark hole that

appeared on terrestrial telescopes as a slowly moving protuberance, sometimes thought to be a mountain peak.

At several times, these had been observed and their rate of travel measured. It had been thought that the period of rotation of Venus had at last been established; but after several such measurements it had been found that their variation in rate of travel was too great.

The picture of Venus flashed off the screen, and was replaced by a man standing before a large chart showing a schematic cross section of the Venus atmosphere.

The drawing showed the atmosphere in layers. There were curved arrows to show the direction and velocity of wind currents. There was a thick blue band to indicate the cloud blanket.

On the sunward side, the cloud blanket extended down to the planet's surface. The man was pointing to the blue band with his pointer.

"On the sunward side," he was saying, "the evaporating oceans shoot clouds of steam up to the stratosphere. Here they begin their process of condensing, dropping back toward the surface as rain. However, before the raindrops can reach the surface, the terrific heat once again evaporates them. This creates a perpetual churning over the sunward third of the planet's surface."

His pointer dropped to a large circle on the drawing.

"Here is roughly the beginning of the hot area," he explained. "Cool air from the dark side drifts into this area, to become hot, lifting upward into the stratosphere along with the evaporating water.

"This continual influx of cool air creates a low pressure area behind the wall. The uprushing heated air and steam spread out, going around the planet to the cooler side away from the

sun. This current speeds up to nearly a thousand miles an hour, part way around, converging on an area that is roughly over the spot farthest from the sunward side.

"The terrific velocity of the air currents of the upper layers drops rapidly as you go down toward the surface. Twenty miles above the surface itself the air currents are almost negligible. Below that, they tend toward the sunward side."

Now, the schematic diagram of the Venus atmosphere was replaced by a globe with land areas and mountain ranges molded to its surface. On the screen, the globe rotated slowly while the commentator used his pointer to indicate the areas he was discussing.

Most of the surface was a smooth blue, indicating oceans. There were three large continents made of brown colored material. A fourth was molded in white.

THE pointer settled on the white area.

"This is the ice continent," the commentator said. "It is the area toward which air currents on Venus converge. Its highest peak is twenty-three thousand, eight hundred and seventy feet above sea level. Like the glaciers on Earth, it flows, spreading out in all directions. At its outer limits, huge icebergs break off, to drift toward the sunward side.

"It is doubtful if there is any land area under this continent of ice that would be above sea level if all the ice were to melt. Sea creatures similar to our seal and walrus swarm along its shores, but find their sustenance in the oceans rather than on the ice. No birds were seen on the ice continent."

His pointer swept across the ocean to the largest of the three land continents.

"This continent," he said, "is Winkum. Of course the other two are Blinkum and Nod. But Winkum is the largest of the three. Also the most favorable to life. It has a high range of mountains which were named the Sierra Corscateh. This mountain range runs along the edge of the sunward side, protecting the area behind it from the sun's rays. Blinkum and Nod have no high mountains. Consequently their rainfall is heavier, storms heat the land surface, and the sun's heat keeps most of it too hot for the life forms found on Venus. Certainly, it is undesirable from our standpoint."

He dropped the tip of his pointer and rested it on his foot, facing the audience from the screen.

"The rest of this picture," he said, "will be devoted to scenes on the surface as taken by moving picture cameras used by the first expedition ever to land there. You will see glimpses of the people of Venus as they flit from hiding place to hiding place. You will see a large number of these natives as they made an all-out attack on the space ship.

"You will see the capture of one specimen brought back, a Venus girl. Two of our men lost their lives for that. They gave their lives to cover the retreat of their comrades who had captured the girl. I might add that the camera man was wounded too."

The commentator vanished, to be replaced by a jungle scene. His voice continued.

"These shots appear much clearer and brighter than they are in actuality. They were taken with infra-red color film."

The jungle vegetation was leafy and dense. There was a continual drip of moisture that flowed along the leaves and down the fleshy trunks of the larger trees. The limbs and trunks of the

trees were a sickly white. The leaves were a pale green, with here and there a plant with red leaves, and a scattering of others with bright yellow.

The ground was a dense carpet of mosses and ferns. Richly colored mushroom growths were everywhere.

There were birds of all descriptions. During the succeeding half hour of slow portrayal of landscape, several dozen different kinds of animals appeared.

THEN the first view of a human being came onto the screen. It was a man. He stood at the edge of the jungle, tall, broad shouldered, and slim waisted. His legs were noticeably long in proportion to the rest of his body.

His skin glistened darkly, perspiration or condensation from the atmosphere giving it a sheen.

Ben, watching the screen as this picture came on, felt at first that something must be wrong with the color film. Then he realized that there was nothing wrong with it. This man of Venus had a jet indigo skin color.

The first surprise over, Ben studied the features with intense interest. The man had a high forehead above somewhat oversized eyes that appeared to be slightly flat. The nose was the most prominent feature, being quite wide with large, flaring nostrils. The way the nostrils flared with breathing reminded Ben of a blooded stallion.

The figure was entirely naked. Nowhere was there a trace of hair. Even the eyes seemed to have no lashes, and there definitely were no eyebrows.

If it were not for the large bronze colored circular shield the Venusian held by hooking his left arm in two straps fastened to it, the thin rope belt about his waist which held several knives of the same bronze metal, and the heavy mallet held in his right hand, there would have been no evidence that

the man possessed any degree of intelligence.

He stood motionless, staring into the camera for a full ten seconds. Then he turned abruptly and vanished into the jungle.

There were other jungle scenes. There were aerial pictures of the jungle, the shoreline, and ten minutes of film devoted to the jagged range of peaks, the Sierra Corscateh.

Then, for the first time, there were men from the Earth ship walking along the mossy surface of the planet. Six of them.

One was carrying a small movie camera. The others had the very latest type of submachine gun cradled in their arms.

The man with the camera moved away from the others a few yards. Then the viewpoint changed. The men watching the screen were now seeing through the eye of the small movie camera carried by an Earthman standing on Venus itself.

Suddenly there was a flash of indigo. It came from a thicket not more than ten yards away. The foliage churned. Whatever was in it had been hit.

Two of the men dropped their guns and rushed recklessly into the thicket, to appear seconds later dragging a wildly struggling figure, a female Venusian!

They started toward the space ship which now showed at one side of the scene.

Several natives burst from the thickets with their huge shields held in front of them. There would be a flash of movement near the top of a shield as a hand appeared and a knife was thrown. Evidently the natives were able to aim through some peephole in the shield and throw from the side of the shield while keeping their bodies completely covered.



Gretta

THEIR aim was deadly. Two of the Earthmen went down before the third could get his machine gun into action. As the now converging wall of bronze shields were being sprayed with the Earthman's machine gun, a knife flashed directly toward the eye of the camera. It was a remarkable shot.

The scene lurched sickeningly, then was replaced by one taken from the ship, showing the camera man being hit and staggering, a knife protruding from his shoulder.

The machine gun had done its work well. Not a warrior was standing.

The Venusian girl, still struggling, was being dragged closer to the ship. There were gasps of awe from the darkened room as she paused, motionless. Her figure was perfectly molded, high firm breasts of purple perfection, slender beautiful legs, and slim waist.

Her face was distinctly feminine and possessed a beauty that seemed almost impossible, in view of the fact that her nose was wide with angrily flaring nostrils and there was no sign of hair anywhere on her entire body.

She had paused, a giantess of strange beauty, the two Earthmen seeming helpless in their attempt to drag her toward the ship. Then she collapsed in a faint. It was only then that it was noticed she was wounded. There was a gaping wound in her side, and a sluggish dark fluid was seeping slowly from it.

The picture vanished from the screen and the room was lit up. There were involuntary sighs of regret from the men who were there.

"That will be all," a voice drew them back to the realities of the present. "Report here tomorrow morning at eight. You are to begin learning the language of this strange race of savages."

The men filed out of the room silently. They were a trifle dazed by all they had seen in so short a time.

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, sir."

Ben Arnold was carrying on a lively, one-sided conversation with General Green while waiting for Jean to come downstairs. It would be their last date before starting to Venus.

Ben hardly heard what General Green was saying. His thoughts were on what he intended to say to Jean tonight. He hoped she would say yes.

At last she appeared on the stairs, a perfect picture of loveliness. Ben rose to greet her.

She tripped down the stairs gayly, her voice as she greeted him a melody in his ears.

Ben took her hand and held it possessively, leading her toward the door.

"Where're you going tonight?" General Green asked.

"Out to the Clam Cove for baked clams and dancing," Ben replied.

"Well," General Green said, "keep your eyes open. Sometimes you find a diamond in a clam that the cook missed when he cooked them."

"You mean pearls, sir," Ben corrected.

"Hah!" General Green snorted. "Even a fool should know you only find pearls in oysters."

He buried his head in his newspaper with a triumphant chuckle. Ben grinned at Jean and held the door open for her. When she had passed him, Ben fumbled in his pocket, drawing out a small ivory box shaped like a heart. He held it so that Jean couldn't see it.

"General Green," he said.

The general looked up and saw the box.

"Is that what you meant, sir?" Ben asked with a smile. Still smiling, he closed the door.

THE Clam Cove was crowded. It seemed that each man of the one and a half million who were to embark on the space ship flotilla within the next few days, had picked that particular place to spend his last leave with his girl friend.

With dinner over and an hour of dancing behind them, Ben and Jean climbed into the car and pointed its nose toward the hills overlooking the Cove.

It was Jean's car, but Ben was driving now. He knew exactly where he wanted to go, and stepped on the gas, fearful that someone else might have

beaten him to it.

No one had. It was the pullout at the highest point of the road as it topped the hill and began its descent on the other side. Here was an unobstructed view of the ocean.

There wasn't a cloud in the sky. The moon shone in full majesty, weaving a carpet of silver that stretched to the horizon in the east. A million stars studded the heavens, seeming larger and closer tonight than ever before.

Ben and Jean sat in silence for several minutes, drinking in the beauty of the scene. They had been here many times before.

It was Ben who broke the silence this time. "Jean," he said softly.

"Yes, Ben?" she invited.

"I—I bought a ring today," he said haltingly.

"Yes?" Jean said.

"I—that is," he groped, "it's an engagement ring. A diamond. You know, one of those things they find in clams." His chuckle was forced and lame.

"It that why they make clams out of men who buy them?"

They both laughed. He held out his arms and Jean went into them.

"Will you marry me when I get back?" Ben asked, his voice muffled by her hair.

"You are a fool in many ways, Ben," Jean said. "I wish so much you had asked me before tonight so that we could be married before you go. Of course I'll marry you when you get back."

"Gee," he said regretfully some time later. "I was so afraid you would say no. I just didn't see how a girl in her right senses could ever marry me. You, especially. You are so beautiful, so wonderful. You could have the moon, the stars. You could have your choice of men so much finer than I that I just couldn't convince myself that you

would choose me."

"You're wrong there, Ben darling," Jean said softly. "A girl looks for something besides the moon and the stars. She looks for love and devotion. Sometimes she even looks for a little worship. But most of all she looks for someone she can feel at home with, someone she can look down on a little, look up to a little, see eye to eye with a lot, and someone who sends little thrills through her heart, so that she feels a little tug inside when he looks at her. When she finds that, she is very lucky. And I've found it, Ben."

"I—I wish I wasn't going to Venus," Ben said. "I would rather stay right here."

"Well," Jean said, chuckling. "Dad said the only way to ever get you to propose was to send you off someplace like this, and you would work up enough courage to ask me just before you left. So maybe it took this assignment to Venus to do it. I only hope that nothing happens to you so that you do come back to me."

A worried frown appeared on her forehead.

"What can happen?" Ben said. "We'll be as safe as if we had never left the Earth, and in less than a year we'll be back."

"And we can be married," Jean said dreamily. "We can have an apartment of our own in the officers' apartment house section."

"But first I'll get a long furlough," Ben said. "We'll travel and see things. We'll see Victoria Falls, the city of the Titans in South America; we'll take a trip in the submarine liners that visit the underwater ruins of Lemuria in the south Pacific, we'll—oh, we'll see lots of things on our moneymoon."

"Come back, Ben," Jean said fiercely. "Whatever you do, whatever it costs, come back. Promise me that."

"Of course I'll come back," Ben said.
"Of course I'll come back."

* * *

THE sound of the torture drum grew louder. Its BOO boo BOO boo BOO boo BOO boo in maddening tempo dinned in the old man's ears, drowning out even the rattling vibrations of the ancient ventilation fan in the wall of the waiting room.

The cadet officers sat in various poses of polite interest, seeming to be unaware of that sound. Yet, how could they help hearing it when it was the very pulse of existence, rising from the roots of the universe and permeating it to the core?

It kept pace with his breathing, with his heart beat, with his thoughts. Whatever he thought, that eternal sound came as a background—a foundation for thought, for memory.

The two sounds, one the echo of the other—one the reflection from the damp dripping growths of the jungle, the other the hollow, soulless protest of a high priest's torture drum. Or were they both from that drum?

No. They were in his mind, his soul. And the wrinkled indigo face of the infinitely old high priest . . .

The sound retreated until it was coming from far away. BOO boo BOO boo BOO boo BOO boo . . .

Alien, impersonal, mechanical, irresistible . . .

* * *

THE fleet of space ships was ready to go. They were utterly unlike the first ship that had made the trip across the void. As a matter of fact, they could not possibly leave the ground unaided, let alone push their way into the stratosphere and break the chains that held them to the Earth.

All they could do was make their own way after being carried far out in space by the one true space craft. This

craft was the original ship that had made the trip, now done over to be the mother ship of the fleet.

A mile and a half long and wide, a quarter of a mile thick at its hub, the mother ship had required too much of the Earth's store of atomic power for its lifting principle, and too much of the rare alloys that made her hull the flawless thing it was, to duplicate even once, let alone several dozen times.

This ship would carry the smaller ships aloft, one after another, until the last one was on its way to Venus. Then it would follow, to circle that planet until it was time to lift them free there so that they could return to Earth.

The Chick Fleet, as it was officially tabbed, could land unassisted on a planet with atmosphere, due to retractible wings and crash-proof construction. The individual ships could steer and travel a course under their own power to Venus and back. It was only the power setup required for rising free from a planet that they lacked.

The morning after his last date with Jean, Ben stood reading the slip of paper giving him his assignment. Fred Larkins joined him, holding a similar slip of paper. "What ship will you be on, Ben?" he asked.

"Chick one," Ben replied.

"Me too," Fred said. "That's a break. How'd you make out with Jean last night? I saw you at the Clam Cove. If you had had eyes for anything, you would have seen me."

"Sorry, Fred," Ben answered, apologetically. "Congratulations are in order, though. I finally worked up my nerve. We're going to be married when this is over."

"Well, good for you," Fred said in surprise. "Congratulations. By the

way, be sure and write her every day. Women sort of insist on that, you know."

"Don't worry, I will . . . Get out of here, you renegade," Ben yelled with an outraged roar. Then he looked blue. "Gosh. I never thought of that. Nearly a year, and I won't be able to see her or even get a letter from her!"

"That ought to be a relief," Fred said succinctly. "That blond baby I took out last night did her best to get me hooked. Nothing doing! When this is over, I'll be a hero. Then I can do much better for myself. Much better," he added with satisfaction.

"Well," Ben said lamely, "let's report in. Get it over with. I feel like a prisoner being sent to the pen."

"I wouldn't know how that feels, myself," Fred said with a knowing look.

"You get used to it," Ben remarked dryly. "I remember the third time they sent me to the Rock for life. The captain of the prison boat at San Francisco barbor said, 'Where's that fiver I loaned you the last trip, you crook.' And I said . . ."

"Where's something I can climb out of this on?" Fred laughed, trying to look desperate.

"Get used to it, son," a new voice broke in. "It's all that'll keep you sane during the next ten months."

Ben and Fred turned to face the newcomer, then came stiffly to attention. It was Georges Ley, commanding officer of Cbick one, and veteran of the maiden trip to Venus.

"At ease, men," he said, grinning at their discomfiture. "I'm informed you are to be on my cbick."

"Yes, sir," Ben and Fred answered together.

"Well, take it easy," he said. "One thing you will learn when we get started is that we are all human beings together out there, not parts of a mili-

tary machine. The only thing I don't allow under my command is stuffed shirts. Now get along and report. We have a lot of organizing to do before zero. Every minute counts."

"Yes, sir," Ben and Fred said crisply. They saluted and turned with a smart heel clip, and hastened away.

Georges Ley watched them depart with a satisfied smile on his handsome, character lined face. They would do all right.

"ALL right. Get along. Make room for the next fellow." The voice of the traffic officer was matter-of-fact, as if he were directing tourists to the right track on a railroad depot.

Fred and Ben "got along," holding their traffic cards firmly in their hands, orderlies following them with their essential luggage. The bus they were to board was waiting outside at the curb.

"Gee, look at that," Fred said in soft amazement. "WAACs!"

"Are women going along too?" Ben exclaimed.

"I hope so," Fred said devoutly. "From the looks of that Venus female, I prefer the home grown variety. I'd have to get pretty blue to pick up with one of them there native gals." He laughed hollowly at his own joke.

Ben looked him over critically. "I doubt if a native girl would give you a second look," he said maliciously. "Look at you. You have—hair" He shuddered realistically over the word.

The two men climbed aboard the already crowded bus and found a seat at the rear. They looked around, recognizing most of the men on board. The WAACs were studiously avoided. There were four of them, two American girls, one Chinese, and the other Russian. Regulations concerning unwaacs were very strict. Many a man had

ruined his army career by merely speaking to one in other than direct line of duty.

If the expedition to Venus met with disaster and rescue was impossible, it was the duty of the survivors to attempt to start an Earth colony on Venus. That was the reason for the presence of the WAACs. Until and unless there was such a major disaster, army discipline would be maintained.

The bus started, pulling out from the curb slowly. It would be an hour's drive to the space port. The passengers looked longingly out of the windows. They were seeing the houses and planned streets of civilization for probably the last time before leaving Earth.

They had to get over into the left lane to pass two cars that had run into each other. The drivers were standing beside their cars, waving their arms in a violent argument. It was the human touch necessary to make the on-lookers chuckle.

Good old Earth. There couldn't be another planet like her in the whole universe!

At last, the bus drew up in front of the space port depot. Its passengers climbed off and drifted into the waiting room in two's and three's. There was a glistening bar, with a full mirror in back of it.

There was also a long lunch counter. The floor space was crowded with tables and chairs. Against one wall was a juke box, the very latest style, as impressive and grand as a circus. A ventilation fan hummed merrily, smelling of factory newness.

"What'll you have, gents?" a bartender asked, grinning broadly. "Everything is on the house today."

Fred and Ben took their hottles of beer and made their way past the tables to one against the far wall. A waitress efficiently took their order for

sandwiches.

They relaxed. This was the last outpost, so far as they were concerned. When they left this room they would go directly to their ship and stay there.

"Why can't we just stay here forever?" Ben asked regretfully. "After all, what has Venus got that this planet hasn't?"

He sighed and leaned his chair back against the wall, placing his feet on the edge of the table.

It was nearly an hour later, with those in the waiting room packed like sardines, that Georges Ley went through. Immediately after, the loud-speaker called all personnel from Chick one to go to gate three.

Regretfully Fred and Ben left their table and joined the parts of the crowd moving toward the exit onto the tarmac. This was it.

GATE three, or for that matter, any of the other seven gates to the field, opened onto the greatest spectacle man could possibly have seen on Earth.

Stretching in two uniform rows were identical ships that looked like giant darning needles with their wings clipped off. There were a hundred and fifty of them, each one as large as an ocean going liner.

The large hump toward the front of each ship, that gave it its darning needle appearance to a large extent, contained the telescoped wings covered by heavy armor.

Under and forward of this wing hump was the shock head, a massive steel construction which acted as the seat of the huge shock springs attached to the crew cylinder.

The crew cylinder was actually the main body of the ship, but was built into the shell as a freely sliding cylinder, resting its forward end against

the shock springs. Any sudden deceleration of the ship would cause the crew section to decelerate more slowly because of the prolonged cushioning effect of the shock spring mechanism. There were shock absorbers which dampened this spring effect.

In the tail of the ship, on the sides under the wing hump, and forward of that, were rocket tubes for steering and a certain amount of speed change.

The shell plates near the stern of the ship were designed so that, at the last minute, in a landing on a planet with atmosphere, they would swing out from the ship and act as tall wings and air brakes, letting the ship land on an even keel at a safe speed. However, the shock setup had been designed so that the ship could plough its nose into the side of a mountain at a speed of two hundred miles an hour without killing any of the crew, provided they had strapped themselves into shock beds in preparation for such an event.

Each of the ships would carry ten thousand persons and thirty thousand tons of freight. Loaded, each ship weighed eighty-three thousand tons. And there were a hundred and fifty of them! This was the achievement of a world at peace with itself, with all nations working together.

So the papers said, and they were largely right. The bickering would really come later when each nation tried for a dominant position on the three habitable continents of Venus.

BEN and Fred were the first to get off the field bus that had carried them from gate three to Chick one. In every direction could be seen speeding busses and trucks. Most of the cargo loading was done, but there were the million and a half people to be loaded in two days—a stupendous task.

There were two unwaacs in the

admission compartment, running auto-files. The two men handed over their identification cards. These were placed under the eye and in a split second two cards came out, giving the details for them, compartment numbers, duties, schedule, etc.

The men were then hastened along the longitudinal shaft, directed by members of the permanent ship's crew, and were assigned to different compartments.

Ben tossed his personal belongings' case on one of the bunks in his compartment, and continued with Fred to his.

"What do you think this means?" Ben asked, pointing to a series of letters on his card after the notation, *Asgn.*

"Hmm," Fred said. "S.d. or s.b. It could be special detail or service detail on shipboard. Maybe it's a new way of writing K.P. They'll probably put you to hydrating the dehydrated potatoes. But wait a minute, I missed this. After it is "rpt to cm 0:0000." That means you are to report to the commander immediately!"

"Where'll I find him?" Ben asked nervously.

"Probably it tells where in our guide books."

The two men hastily searched through their pocket guide books. They didn't have far to look. A schematic diagram of the ship inside the cover gave them the proper place.

Ben soon found it and knocked on the door. It was opened by an orderly who stepped aside and invited him in to the ornate cabin. While he waited for Georges Ley to appear, Ben walked about on the thick, luxurious rug, examining the furniture and paintings on the wall.

"Ley must go in for the better life!" he muttered thoughtfully to himself.

An almost inaudible sound of a door being opened signalled the arrival of Captain Ley.

"So you are Benjamin Arnold," Georges Ley greeted him. "Well, so much the better. Although Gretta has little sense of humor, you will find yours necessary to get along with her."

"Yes, sir," Ben said, coming smartly to attention and saluting. His face showed his curiosity, but he refrained from asking questions.

Georges looked at him quizzically for a moment. "Aren't you curious?" he asked, smiling.

"Yes, sir," Ben admitted, and added, "but I learned long ago that the quickest way to find out things in the unarmy is to keep my mouth shut and listen to my superiors."

"A boring procedure, but effective," Georges commented. "Well, to satisfy your curiosity, Gretta is the name we have given the Venus girl. You are to have the doubtful distinction of making her acquaintance and trying to gain her confidence during our trip to Venus."

GEORGES raised his hand to his face to hide a smile. "It was decided you were to have a completely free hand in this," he said. "Frankly, anything goes. If you can make her fall in love with you, so much the better. From a purely scientific standpoint, you know, it would be highly desirable to determine if the two races are compatible genetically. We are issuing no commands on that score, mind you, but let your judgment be your guide."

"What!" Ben exclaimed. "Count me out of this. Aside from other things, I am engaged to General Green's daughter. We're going to be married when I get back."

Captain Ley walked over to a

mahogany liquor cabinet and opened it, his back to Ben. "You know," he said, without turning around. "I could have you shot for your last remark. I thought it was quite clear that your orders are to get acquainted with Gretta on any basis you see fit. That is up to you. But when we get to Venus, she must be eating out of your hand. Is that straight?"

"Wi—will she have any clothes on?" Ben asked, heads of perspiration standing out on his forehead.

"Yes," Captain Ley answered, "although she is very careless about such things. She is neat, househroke is the word, I believe. And she has an instinctive abhorrence of filth. You will have to shave just before seeing her, each time. You don't have to cut off the hair on your head, however. She knows that that is part of the Earth human body."

He turned and offered Ben a drink he had just mixed. "You were chosen for this task for two reasons. One, you are more proficient at her language than any of the others are. Two, you are six foot two, more nearly her height than any of the others who mastered her language. In brief, you have a better chance of winning her friendship than anyone else."

"But what of those who have been with her since she was captured?" Ben asked desperately.

"She doesn't like any of them," Captain Ley said disgustedly. "You may as well know that I am one of those who tried to gain her friendship and failed. She tolerates me. That's all. That's the reason I was assigned the command of Chick one. I'm the only one she will tolerate and listen to."

"Well," Ben nervously turned his liquor glass in his fingers. "I suppose an order is an order. I'll do my best to win Gretta's friendship because I

realize it may mean the difference between peace and war with the Venusians; but as for anything more, nothing doing!"

"It was a little too much to expect," Georges Ley said with a lame chuckle. "However, I was ordered to suggest it to you. Forget I said anything about it, will you?"

"Of course, sir," Ben answered respectfully. "When am I supposed to begin?"

"Right now," Captain Ley said. "Finish your drink and I'll introduce you to her. She has the compartment next to mine."

"Just like that, huh!" Ben murmured, finishing his drink in one gulp.

HE FOLLOWED Captain Ley to a door at the side of the room. After the captain unlocked the door he swung it open, revealing an equally luxurious room on the other side.

The person that rose from a deep chair to greet them was one of those things that "just ain't," in the common vernacular. Imagine a well proportioned woman seven feet tall, totally bald and without eyebrows or eyelashes. Imagine a feminine, beautiful face (if you cover up the wide nose with the large flaring nostrils), with well molded, warm lips, big warm eyes, shell-like ears, a curve to the jaw and chin that Miss America might well envy. And a body she would surely envy, only partly concealed by a specially tailored unwaac uniform.

Now cover the face with something and expose only the nose. It would look like a cross between the nostrils of a miniature horse and that of a gorilla. Expressive, animal-like, in contradistinction to the beauty of the rest of the face.

Imagine all the exposed portions of the skin of this creature—not white or

tan or yellow or black, but a deep indigo. Picture the flawless white teeth with the almost black tongue as her mouth opens in a smile. That was the Venus girl. Like the duck bill platypus—something that just can't be.

In the first few minutes of introduction, Ben sensed that he had been "built-up" to her in anticipation of this meeting. She seemed a trifle coquetish, more than a little self conscious, and her facial muscles used a universal language of expression perfectly. Her smile was very nice, he thought. Her voice was much nicer than it had seemed on the language records. And her nose seemed to "fit" somehow, and seem natural. Perhaps it was because she was so used to having it.

Against his will, Ben felt himself relaxing inside and enjoying this meeting. He even caught himself thinking that his special assignment might not be bad.

In pronouncing her name, he found that the *e* in Gretta had to be formed by trying to form an *e* like in green and a *u* like in universal, both at the same time. It sounded like a prolonged purring of a German umlaut *u*. The *a* on the end wasn't really an *a*, but more like a mild explosive ending to a sharp *t*. That was the way she pronounced it, and the sound had a beauty that surprised him immeasurably.

He found himself uncomfortably aware of her curves, and a trifle angry at himself for being so. She was all woman. There was a womaness about her that crept under his skin and made him a trifle light headed. The language he had learned with great effort from the records, began to *live* in his mind as he used it and heard it spoken by Gretta. He didn't know when Georges Ley left the room. It came as a shock that he could have been so absorbed in this Venus female as not to notice such a thing.

GRETТА was very careless of keeping her dress down as she twisted occasionally in her chair, and seemed entirely unconscious of Ben's staring which he couldn't help. He realized she would have felt more comfortable without the dress. The thought that she might discard it as an uncomfortable nuisance, when she knew him better, sent tingles of fear and pleasure along his spine.

Then he forced himself to concentrate on her nose, and to remember that she was not human as he thought of the word.

He emerged from this first meeting with his conceptions tottering precariously and delightfully. He didn't remember a thing they had talked about, much to his embarrassment when Captain Ley asked him. All he could remember was the dynamic, alive body, the warm, interested eyes, and the subtly expressive lips, a symphony in indigo. And after all, what is a woman if not a symphony, a melody of form and expression? Woman is found in the grace of the female cat, the playfulness of the puppyish bitch, the grace and beauty of the blooded mare, as well as in the dance of the harem girl or the Hollywood star. And Gretta embodied them all in a delightfully new guise of strangeness and contrast. She was Female.

THE next two days were spent in almost continual drill for emergency operations. Every member of the crew and the passengers had to familiarize themselves with what they were to do if some section of the ship were hit by a rock in space. In practice operations, whole sections of the ship were sealed off and communications established between the isolated compartments.

First aid procedure, for those caught in suddenly evacuated compartments in

case of such a happening, was drilled into every person on board. They were taught how to allow their breath to escape so as not to explode their chest, in case all the air in the compartment they were in was suddenly to escape through a gaping hole in the shell. They were told in detail the physical things which would take place in their bodies. How their eyes would squeeze out of their sockets painfully, and must be left alone until a doctor could tend to them; how their blood would bubble through their skin and create an intolerable pin pricking sensation all over the body.

They had to learn how to make their way to the lockers that contained space suits, and to put the suits on, without benefit of eyesight. They had to learn what pressures they could stand at first, and how to get their lungs to accept air again.

They were given a small, candy coated capsule on a chain which they were to wear around their necks. This contained a strong drug somewhat like codeine which would kill pain without producing unconsciousness. This drug would make possible the retention of consciousness long enough to get safely into a space suit in the vacuum of space.

In a short time, the ten thousand people on board were becoming one big happy family. They each wore a big "one" on their sleeve, sewed into the cloth. They were developing ship loyalty, and soon began making plans to challenge the other ships to ball games, when they got settled on Venus.

THE zero hour arrived. All on board felt the first motions as the ship was wheeled up the ramp of the gigantic space ship. They felt their ship tilt upward as it went up the incline, and felt the vibration of the clamps as they banged against the hull, locking their ship in place.

Finally they felt their weight increase from the climb as the space ship carried them upward. They were off! They couldn't see a thing. Only Captain Ley and his officers would be able to see anything outside on this journey through space. Nevertheless, the realization that in an hour or two they would be far above the Earth's atmosphere, ready to be shot out from the mother ship on their own, to crawl through the interplanetary void to Venus unassisted, was a real thrill to all on board.

They could visualize every step of the way because they had seen it all in animated cartoon during their initial training period. And all of them had at one time or another seen the mother ship.

They knew it had to be as big as it was or the drive principle wouldn't work. This drive utilized so many millions of electrostatic volts pressure between the lift plates and the forward drive that there would be fatal arcing if the ship were built smaller.

None could tell when they were shot out from the huge ship, it was done so smoothly. When the melodious ship bell sounded over the intercom, signaling that they were "on their own," there were exclamations of disbelief. How could they be on their own? There was no evidence of motion, there had been no jar when they cut loose from their moorings in the hold of the larger craft.

It was only when one went near the walls of the various compartments that there was any evidence that normal gravity wasn't working. Then a feeling of lightness and vertigo was experienced.*

*ED. NOTE: The gravity device used on these ships acts in much the same way as a magnet acts on the electrons in a wire coil. It sets up a difference of potential toward the floor plates, which pushes every atom above this floor downward, producing all the common effects of gravity on all objects. The device itself sets up a gravity vortex analogous to a magnetic field. The field cannot be uniform, and is designed so that its weak areas are near walls where they are not needed so much.

"SO FAR so good," Fred said. "We're a week along now, and no hits on the shell."

He looked at Ben who was staring dreamily into space and had obviously paid no attention to him.

"What's the matter with you, Ben?" he asked, exasperated. "You've been acting queer lately. Don't tell me you're falling in love with that uncivilized Venus wench! I don't think Jean would stand for that."

"Keep remarks like that to yourself," Ben said stiffly. "If it came to a showdown, I think the Venusians have more of a right to the word civilized than we have. If you must know, I don't like this attack in force. I think much more could be accomplished by a small party going in a spirit of friendliness."

"But aren't we going in friendship?" Fred asked, wondering amazement in his voice.

"Nuts," Ben snorted. "Then why the million and a half men with full battle equipment? Mark my words: Any attempt at friendship will be made after we establish our hold on the planet, not before."

"Why sure," Fred answered. "That's only common sense. The Venusians are only wandering hands of savages. They have no central government we can deal with. We can't do otherwise. We have to secure a position first, then try to make friends with them."

"Nothing but trouble can come out of that method," Ben said pessimistically. "The Venusians do have a central government. It is a religious rule, to be sure, but it holds absolute power. Unless we win its friendship, we won't get anywhere with the individual tribes. You'll see."

"Hey! Which side are you on?" Fred joked.

"Ours, of course," Ben said. "But that doesn't mean I agree with every-

thing we do. Did you ever read anything about Earth history? I mean about the way the white race moved in and destroyed everything worth while about a culture before starting to study it? It's always been that way. First we move in and gain control, killing the opposition. Then, we send in businessmen and missionaries to industrialize and Christianize the land. Then, when it begins to look like the back yard of the Bronx, the archaeologists and other scientists march in and ride around on the streetcars, coming up with a book on the country, its culture, historic remains, and religion.

"The same thing is going to be done all over again, but this time with a whole planet. I don't like it."

"Well," Fred said practically, "There's nothing you can do about it except obey orders, so stop beefing. I have my orders, too, and I intend to carry them out to the letter. You won't find me being hauled up for high treason because of a lot of blue noses. Ha ha! That's a good one!"

He looked at Ben's worried face.

"Well, on second thought maybe it isn't," he added lamely. He went on in a kindlier tone. "Look Ben. Why don't you stop taking the problems of Venus on your shoulders. Make out your reports, make official recommendations, and stop worrying."

"O.K., Fred," Ben said. "At least, I won't bother you with them any more."

BEN and Fred were grinning at each other when the ship gave a sudden lurch that threw them off their feet.

"What was that?" Fred yelled, trying to grab onto something.

There were three more lurches which sent them sprawling against a wall.

The intercom gave off a series of shrill whistles which indicated that com-

partments G and N were punctured.

Ben picked himself up cautiously and bent over Fred. Fred had been knocked unconscious, but opened his eyes while Ben was trying to lift him to the nearest bunk.

The intercom sputtered, then said, "Compartments G and N punctured by hits. Take emergency stations. There may be more. We are in an unforeseen asteroid area. Take emergency stations."

It sputtered again almost immediately. "Lt. Arnold, report to Captain Ley at once," it said.

"I have to go," Ben said. "Will you be all right, Fred?"

"Sure," Fred said weakly. "Just a conk on the head. I'll be all right in a minute. Go on."

Ben rushed anxiously out of the cabin and made his way forward. When he burst into the captain's cabin, Georges Lay pointed wordlessly toward Gretta's door, then turned back to his desk and the phone. He was chewing anxiously on a cigar, while he listened to reports from the pilot's room on the asteroids outside.

Ben wasted no time. He opened the door to Gretta's compartment expecting to see her in hysteria. Instead, she met him with a look of joy on her face.

"We are at Venus now?" she asked. "The bumps—they mean we have arrived?"

"No, Gretta," Ben said, relieved that she wasn't alarmed. "We just bit some rocks. We have a long way to go yet before you are home."

"Well," she shrugged her smooth shoulders in resignation, "it doesn't matter. So long as I have you for my companion, it doesn't matter when I get home."

She bathed him in a warm glance of affection, then looked shyly away.

In the week Ben had known Gretta,

she had changed much. She had become more Earth womanly, for one thing, and taken on a certain air of shyness toward him.

Captain Ley had had to show her reels of pictures on how Earth women behaved, how they dressed, how they walked, etc. She had practiced for hours to imitate what she saw in those pictures. She had dived into the wardrobe of clothes tailored for her, where she had contemptuously ignored them before.

The very sincerity of her obvious love for Ben, and the attempt she was making to become more like girls on Earth, made it impossible to laugh at her.

BEN felt a little choking feeling in his throat now as she turned her eyes away. He hated himself for passively allowing Gretta to fall in love with him. He hated Captain Ley for choosing him for the roll of fifth columnist or peace delegate. He frankly admitted to himself that he was growing to love this Venus girl. He told himself that it was the same kind of love he would have for a dog or cat. But he knew he would not experience the same choking feeling for a little mother cat who loved him and worshipped the ground he walked on.

The earlier dash of cold water—a good look at Gretta's alien nose and bald head—no longer worked. Instead, her nose now looked beautiful, as if it "belonged," and her lack of hair no longer seemed a deformity, but served to bring out the beautiful contours of her well-shaped head.

She reached out impulsively and took his hand, leading him toward a chair.

"Let's play some checkers, Ben," she said. "I know it isn't your regular time to be with me. I suppose Captain Ley thought I would be afraid and sent you to calm me. If that is so and he comes

in, you can tell him that a game of checkers is the only thing that would calm me."

"If you're not afraid, I'd better get out and see if I can help," Ben said lamely.

"If you do, I'll only scream," Gretta said. "Then Ley will order you to come back. Anyway, with ten thousand people out there, they certainly don't need you."

She pushed him playfully into the chair, then bent over and kissed him. He was too surprised to do anything more than just look at her.

She stood up and looked down at him.

"That was nice, wasn't it?" she asked. "I learned about it in a movie this morning. It's what Earth girls do when . . ." She turned away abruptly and went to a drawer, taking out the checker board and box of checkers.

"Cheer up, Ben," she said when she came back. "You are always looking so blue lately. I know, if you can beat me I'll dance for you. Earth girls dance, and so do we on Venus. Would you like that?" She looked at him wistfully.

"Of course, Gretta," Ben said, smiling with an effort to be spontaneous.

"Then I won't wait until you beat me at checkers," she said firmly. "You haven't seen how we can dance on Venus. I'll show you."

"Here." She ran into another room and returned with a drum made of a three foot section of fourteen inch pipe and two sheets of thin leather. "I talked Captain Ley into getting these from the ships stores for me. I made it myself. Play it like this."

She pounded gently on the drum in a certain rhythm. Ben, glad of something to do, picked up the rhythm after a few tries. Gretta listened critically for a moment, and seemed satisfied at what she heard.

SHE began her dance. It was a slow, rhythmic movement with short steps. "This is the dance of M'bong-ah," she explained. "It is the dance of the temple girls to the Gods of Venus. We must all learn it when we are young, because there is no way of knowing when we will be chosen to dance in one of the temples. Therefore, we must be ready."

Gretta changed the dance slightly.

"This is to the great Ice God who lives in the center of the waters," she explained. "Every priest must make the pilgrimage to the home of the Ice God in a boat. If he does not return, and many don't, it is presumed that he did not please Him."

Suddenly, she fumbled with the buttons on her dress. Then she pulled it off in a hasty motion, revealing her wonderful, lithe body.

Gretta greeted him warmly, and he advanced slowly toward the "loveliest" woman of two worlds



"I cannot dance with clothes on," she said. Then she swung into a violent dance with graceful, sweeping motions.

"This is to the Heat God that dwells in His temple under the sun," she exclaimed. "He is the most powerful of all the Gods of Venus. No one can approach him, though many have tried."

* * *

Ben, against his will, watched her smooth body in its gyrating contortions. He had stopped playing on the drum, yet somehow the drum beats seemed still to impinge on the atmosphere. He was aware of nothing except that glistening, indigo body. He was hypnotized by the poetry of form and motion, and his heart pounded against his ribs, but strangely, with the tempo of the drum: Bom-bom BOM, bom-bom BOM. And beads of sweat dotted his brow, sliding into his eyes to blind him.

He wiped the sweat out of his eyes with his knuckles.

The sound of the torture drums beat in ever-louder dominating thumps, driving into his brain and becoming a part of his soul's life. Loud. They could not stop until his heart stopped beating. Or was it that his heart couldn't stop beating until the drums stopped?

He looked at his knuckles curiously. They were old and gnarled. Dirty. His mind was confused. This was the waiting room of the space port depot, not Gretta's room in the space ship.

He should stay put. It wouldn't do, this shifting around so much. His weak eyes looked at the ring of faces of the young cadets, waiting for him to continue. Had he been talking to them?

He tried to remember if he had been talking. He musn't talk. The torture drums. They weren't so loud now. No. They were far away. But were they torture drums? He closed his eyes and tried to think.

* * *

BOM-bom BOM, bom-bom BOM.

His hands were beating the drum as if with a will of their own. Gretta's indigo body was weaving a symphony of movement over the rich carpet of her room.

The dance was finished. Gretta completed it with a mad pirouette, dropping to the floor on her knees, prostrating her lithe form in a pose of abject worship. She held that pose for a full minute, then rose and hastily donned her dress once more, her eyes downcast in embarrassment.

"I'm sorry, Ben," she said contritely. "But I simply can't dance with clothes on, and I wanted so much to dance for you. You forgive me, don't you?" Her eyes pleaded with him.

"Of course, Gretta," Ben said shakily.

Gretta advanced hesitantly. Her lips were trembling and tears welled from her soft brown eyes, moistening her indigo cheeks.

A part of Ben's mind whispered, "A good plastic surgeon could put a piece of cartilage in her nose and remold the nostrils so that they would be perfectly human, and thousands of women have to wear wigs."

Suddenly Gretta dropped to her knees and buried her head in Ben's lap. She sobbed uncontrollably, her hands clutching spasmodically at his knees.

"Oh, Ben," she sobbed. "I love you and it's so hopeless, and I wish I had never been born."

Ben reached out and put his hand under her chin, raising her face until he could look into her eyes. In his mind, an emotional storm was raging. She looked at him half fearfully, her eyes glistening with tears, a hope slowly dawning on her face.

"Gretta," he choked.

"Yes, Ben?" she said breathlessly.

"I—I—I'd better get out and see



The giant drum throbbed madly as she beat on it in ecstasy of the wild dance

what the extent of the damage to the ship was," he said, hastily rising.

She stood up with him. For several seconds they looked at one another. Then, madly, his senses on fire, he took her in his arms.

Her alien indigo face with its flaring nostrils, her hairless head and expressive eyes, hovered in delicious, nightmarish reality in his vision. Her warm, living body pressed against his.

Their lips met hungrily. His mind reeled under the surge of emotion.

HE FOUND himself standing with his back pressed against the door to Gretta's compartment. He had no recollection of how he had gotten out there. His breath was raw and hot. He felt spent and exhausted.

"I've got to think," he said out loud. He felt he had to hear the sound of his voice to know he was alive and real.

Captain Ley was sitting at his desk, intent on some papers. He appeared not to have noticed Ben's entrance from Gretta's room.

With a visible effort, Ben quieted his breathing and made his expression more normal. Then he walked casually over to Ley's desk.

Georges looked up with a worried smile. "Hello, Ben," he said absently.

"What's the extent of the damage, sir?" Ben asked.

"Bad," Captain Ley said. He filled and lit his pipe in silence. Then he went on, "Besides two compartments damaged and evacuated, the guide rails between the outer shell and the main cylinder are bent in three places. That means that a head-on landing would wreck us."

He chewed on the stem of his pipe. "There are forty dead and seventy-three hospitalized from that bombardment."

The desk phone rang. Captain Ley

picked up the receiver. He listened in silence for a couple of minutes. "You'll have to put everything into getting that fixed," he said into the phone. "Let the other stuff go until you get that done."

He listened some more. "Well, cut some material from the shell about the damaged sections then," he said exasperatedly.

More listening. "I don't care if it costs twenty lives," he said. "They'll be lost anyway if that isn't fixed in time. You know that."

He hung up. His eyes brooded on Ben while he puffed on his pipe. "The tail assembly is badly damaged," he said sourly. "If they don't get it fixed before we hit the Venus atmosphere, we won't have any way to brake the ship for landing, and with the guide rails bent, we can't crash land and trust to our shock absorbers."

"And if we don't land," Ben added, "we fry in the sun, because we haven't enough power to change our trajectory, and if we did we haven't enough chemicals for air renewal to last until we went around the sun so we could land on the Earth or Venus again."

"That's right," Georges said, "And we can't hope the mother ship will catch up with us before we hit Venus. She won't even be through with lifting all the chicks off the Earth."

He grinned wryly. "I may as well tell you now," he said. "The mathematicians calculated that two of the chicks would be destroyed on this run to Venus. Looks like we're one of the two!"

"You mean," Ben asked, "if we don't get the tail fixed we are done for?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," Georges answered cheerfully. "We can still dip into Venus's atmosphere. We can sail around with a heavy tail until our speed is down a little. Then we have to land

wherever we wind up, whether it is in the ocean, on the ice continent, or in the center of the hot spot. We might be lucky."

BEN left the captain's compartment and went to Fred's quarters. Fred was asleep. He sat down and waited for him to wake up.

The compartment was quiet. Everyone else that belonged in it was out.

Ben closed his eyes and tried to think things out. All he could do was curse his fate: his fate that had made him fall in love with one of his own kind and then embark on a journey that would probably lose her to him forever; his fate that had now made him fall in love with a blue-skinned, seven foot giantess from Venus with a nose like an animal's and a heart like that of the finest person on Earth, and with a body that could nestle against his so pleasurably.

He found himself thinking in the Venusian tongue instead of in English, and cursed himself for that. He liked their language. In some ways, it was much more expressive and natural than English or any Earth language he knew. It wasn't poetic. It didn't lend itself to poetry at all. Yet there was a beat to it that made a poetry of a different sort, like a drum or tom-tom makes music in a different way than a violin.

It was a kind of nature language. Very difficult to speak, yet easily understood. When it was partly mixed with English, as it had to be when things not known on Venus, such as dresses, were mentioned, it sounded like a tongue twister expert on the radio spouting double talk.

He chuckled, then became aware that Fred was watching him. "Awake, Fred?" he asked.

"Ya," Fred said drowsily. "What

time is it?"

Ben looked at his wrist watch. "Half an hour till chow," he answered.

"Might as well get up then," Fred said sleepily. "Have to shave before chow today. Save the undertaker the trouble later on if I'm nicely shaven."

He stuck his feet over the edge of the bunk and stretched lazily. Then he got up and went over to the corner washstand of monel metal. He hummed a tune while he shaved. Ben sat quietly and watched him. After Fred had dressed, the two went out into the corridor and toward the stern to the mess hall.

Afterwards, Fred grinned at him, waved his hand in a mock goodbye, and left. He greeted Ben with the same grin four hours later in the hospital where Ben had hurried in answer to Fred's call.

DURING the flight, Fred had been working on the tail assembly, a volunteer job. Cosmic rays were stronger than they had thought. The men would spend one hour on the tail job, then stay in the hospital for a week. It turned out that half an hour's work with two weeks in the hospital would be more like it. But it cost lives to find that out.

Ben stood by the side of Fred's bed. Nurses were hovering over the inert figure. While Ben watched, Fred tensed. Perspiration squeezed out of the pores of the skin on his white, flawless forehead, and stood there like glass beads. That lasted a minute, then Fred relaxed with a sigh.

"Funny," he said to Ben. "A man is born, grows up, lives a little and loves a little, all so's he can put in an hour on a tail repair job."

A nurse dressed in crisp white was holding his wrist. A faraway look came into his clear blue eyes. He

turned his eyes toward the ceiling. "What a waste!" he whispered loudly.

He remained that way, with his mouth partly open, exposing his even white teeth, his eyes on the ceiling. The nurse frowned, as if she were exasperated at losing track of his pulse.

"So long, Fred," Ben said softly, and left the room.

He hesitated in the corridor. Finally, he went forward to the captain's compartment. Georges wasn't there. He crossed the deep carpet and unlocked Gretta's door.

Inside, she came forward to meet him and put her arms around him.

"Fred's dead," Ben said simply. Then he laid his head on Gretta's breast, and she put her arms around him. Within them, he found the comfort he needed for his tortured thoughts.

"Have to shave before chow today. Save the undertaker the trouble later on if I'm shaven," Fred had said. Funny . . .

IN THE days that followed, Ben spent more and more time with Gretta, and when not with her he was quiet and kept mostly to himself. Captain Ley noticed this, and asked the ship's psychologist to study Ben unobtrusively.

The repairs on the tail section weren't going so well. Hope that the tail would be in working condition by the time the chick ship hit Venus's atmosphere, was rapidly waning.

Contact had been established with one of the other chicks, and eventually with the mother ship and the Earth. Nothing could reach chick one in time to save her. However, if they could stay in the air long enough before landing, chick two would attempt to find them and land near them at the same time, and thus be ready to help and give assistance to the injured, as well as defend them from the savages.

Venus was growing larger every day. In the pilot cabin, the specially designed telescope brought it close enough so that the details of the stratospheric storms could occasionally be made out. Corrections were being made on the course, which had been thrown off slightly by the asteroids that had struck them.

The corrected course would take them into the atmosphere of Venus at a tangent, and in such a direction that they would miss going over the hot side. Their forward brake rockets would cut their speed down from about thirty thousand miles an hour to a little under ten thousand by the time they hit the first wisps of air.

Tension in the ship mounted as the day approached. Ben likened it in his mind to a trip on a roller coaster. It was like the clackety-clack of the cars going up the first steep slope, slowly pulled by the clicking chain.

That was the way it was now, only the noise of the perpetual conversation supplanted the noise of the chain. Pretty soon there would come the firing of the forward rockets. That would be the pause at the top of the roller coaster before the downward plunge. He could even hear the voice of the barker. "Hold your hats! Keep your seats." They would, too. Everyone on board would have to strap himself or herself into a shock seat, facing backward with a body-formed back rest.

Ben knew that Georges Ley didn't think there was much chance of their coming out alive. The tail assembly hadn't been completely repaired to function as it should. They would have to trust to the forward wings. The ship couldn't be steered. It would have to go where it willed, and be dropped in some spot that looked soft.

The radio operator had radioed all the details of the damage by relay back

along the string of chick ships to Earth. Already they would be altering the blueprints for the next series of ships. A lot of good that would do chick one!

Gretta seemed to understand the spot they were in. Ben had kept her informed on every detail. With the final hour before the plunge drawing ever closer, he spent more and more time with her. Often the sound of the drum crept through the wall to Georges Ley's ears, as he frowned over reports and scrawled figures on paper in an attempt to find a solution to their difficulties.

THEN the hour, the minute, the second crept up. Everyone was strapped into their shock seats. Georges pressed his finger down on the button that set off the first of the charges in the deceleration tubes. There was a dull roar, and then a sliding motion accompanied by a series of rending crashes.

There was no time to investigate. The second and then the third charge went off. The ship began to bounce. An almost inaudible screech began to grow as the tenuous atmosphere tore at the ship's plates.

The collapsible wings were out finally, and just in time. Air so thin that there was no more than a single atom in a cubic foot of it hit the wings with sledge hammer blows, causing the ship to jump and sway.

More blasts from the forward jets cut their speed down continually.

The bucking and swaying of the ship increased rapidly. Without the tail wings to steady the craft, the huge expanse of body tipped downward, presenting a broad surface which caught at the air and lifted too high, dropping again to be pounded by sledge hammer blows.

The intercom, still working, announced that they had circled the

planet once and were on their second time around. Their speed was down to a thousand miles an hour and still dropping rapidly.

Then they struck. The forward half of the ship cleared the jagged edge of the mountain, but the stern half, hanging like the dropping tail of a rigid kite, slapped the edge of the mountain and sheared off, sending two thousand bodies flying in all directions.

The front half spun end over end, pivoted by the undamaged wings, and miraculously stuck its nose in the geometric center of a six hundred acre plateau far up in the Sierra Corscoteh range. By a second miracle, the ship cylinder slid smoothly on its guide rails and took the full cushioning effect of the shock absorber system, so that many did not even lose consciousness.

Within twenty minutes, a radio beacon had been set up and flares put out. Almost before the task was finished, chick two loomed out of the fog and settled to the ground without a scratch. Her landing wheels were out, and when she landed she crept over to the extreme edge of the plateau.

From then on, at two hour intervals, the chicks loomed darkly out of the fog and materialized into vast things settling on wheels, moving businesslike to the edge of the plateau like cars in a theater parking lot.

It was vast, impersonal, and ghostly. The dense fog caused reality to fade off at a few feet, and gave the illusion that the entire cosmos was incredibly small.

By accident, chick one had landed on the most ideal site conceivable. Here, far up in the Sierra Corscotehs, they could lay their base for future operations. From here they could send out scouting planes and troops, until they had spread their power over all of Venus.

Here they were impregnable. No force of any size could come near the spot without exposing itself to annihilation. It was even doubtful if the natives of Venus could find the place.

The temperature here was ideal, a comfortable sixty-five degrees. And most wonderful of all, the gigantic mother ship could drop to the plateau and pick up the chick ships with ease.

THERE was a general bustle of activity as workers began the task of building permanent buildings, high officers convened to discuss the general plans for the next few weeks, and high and low alike walked along just scuffing their shoes in the soil, thankful that after their journey through the void of interplanetary space there was soil to scuff in.

A steady atmospheric drift of three miles an hour was measured. This came up the slope from the dark side of the planet and crossed the higher mountains down into the area where the sun's searing rays heated it again and filled it with high temperature steam.

Scouting expeditions were sent out to explore the neighboring hills in search of deposits of various substances. One of the things most needed was cement for the many concrete structures that would go up. This material had not been brought along because it was so certain there would be plentiful supplies of the rocks out of which the cement is made.

It was a field day for everyone who had a specialty, whether it was weather or geology, physics or chemistry.

There was also an abundance of material for the biologists to work on. The plateau itself was covered with a mossy carpet of literally hundreds of varieties of plants. Insects abounded, and an occasional warm blooded animal

was trapped and captured alive.

In the midst of all this Gretta, the native Venusian, moved silently, watching wide eyed, always accompanied by Ben.

With Ben at her side, she often consented to long sessions with the other of the Venusian language scholars. She told them many tales of the life and religion, of the foods and habits of the native Venusians.

It was planned that she would be sent with Ben and several others of the men who could speak Venusian in a good will expedition to the lowlands. If they could contact the nearby tribes and convince them of the friendly intentions of the Earth invaders, these tribes might spread the news and make things less difficult when more people arrived from Earth and systematic colonization began.

Three months rolled by. A cement plant was working. Cinder block buildings were going up everywhere. Massive machines were transforming the fog veiled terrain into a civilized area with concrete streets and buildings. There was a great deal of sunlight in spite of the fog, and it was hoped that enough varieties of vegetables from the Earth would flourish to make the first colony self-supporting.

The day came for Gretta and Ben to wend their way down the mountain accompanied by a small army of troops whose officers spoke Venusian. The troops were lined up awaiting the orders for marching. The United Nations flag with its white background, a golden sun in the center with ten circles of various colors around it, waved lazily at the head of the troops.

Georges Ley was talking to Ben. Gretta was holding Ben's hand fearfully, her eyes darting here and there over the heads of the surrounding thousands of people.

"BE CAREFUL, Ben," Georges was saying. "These natives are fierce and savage. They will fight. No doubt of that. You'll have to lick the first batch you run into. Then it's your job to convince the survivors that playing ball with us is the only hope they have for survival. Gretta will serve as an example of how we will treat those of the natives that become friendly. All her fine clothes go with her."

He turned to Gretta. "It is hoped your people will like your fine clothes and be friendly with our representative. Do you think they might?"

"I don't know," Gretta replied. "They will probably be afraid of me with clothes on. They may not even think that I am one of them. Not knowing what clothes are, they will mistake them for body growths, just as I did when I was taken. We may all be killed because the warrior is taught to kill first and then investigate, and Venusian warriors are greater and more powerful than you little men. Also, they know how to blend with the trees and the ground so that they cannot be seen. Why don't you just be satisfied with staying up here in the mountains and not going down there? It can only lead to trouble. Every tribe has its own territory which belongs to it by right of heritage since the Beginning. Only the high priest of all the tribes could change that."

Georges shrugged. "We must go down because it is the command of the high priest of us little people of the Earth," he said. "We dare not do otherwise."

"Then you must take drums," Gretta said earnestly. "You must take many drums and beat them for peace."

"What's this?" Georges said in surprise. He turned to Ben. "What's this about drums? I thought you were supposed to find out what the best ap-

proach to these savages is?"

"She never told me," Ben said in confusion.

"Yes, drums," Gretta said hastily. "When one tribe goes into the territory of another without wishing war, it beats the drums in the peace beat. Bom. Ba ba ba ba. Bom. Ba ba ba ba. Like that."

Georges issued a hasty order. Soon a drum was brought. The drummer in the band came with it, objecting that he didn't intend to join the expedition. He was only a drummer, not a soldier.

He quickly picked up the right rhythm for the peace beat and was ordered to accompany the troops.

It was a ghostly procession that wound carefully down the mountain side. It had not gone a mile before it was in unexplored territory. Markers were built every five hundred feet so that they could find their way back.

IN A MILE they dropped a thousand feet. It began to rain. The vegetation changed in character to a very dense weave of pale colored grasses. Over this carpet the men marched, with Gretta near the front, accompanied by Ben who walked with his face straight ahead, his lips in a grim line, his eyes cold and emotionless.

Gretta looked at him anxiously from time to time and kept near him. The others marched ahead and behind in a lonely line, a handful of humans on an alien world, each alone with his thoughts.

They emerged from the fog onto a promontory that overlooked a deep valley. Steaming jungle formed a smooth carpet two thousand feet below them.

The rain had been left behind. The fog now stretched as a smooth grey ceiling which started a few feet above their heads and went in every direction. Here and there, a bluish grey veil

seemed to hang from it. Permeating the cloud ceiling, the blue veils, and the varicolored carpet of the jungle was a universal luminosity that came from the sun's rays, dispersed and redispersed, creeping half way around the globe as the minute water globules that made up the cloud layer picked them up and relayed them.

At their feet, the ground dropped away in a steep slope which was deeply scored by ugly channels in which waters tossed their hoary crests in wild exultation, fed by the continual rains on the mountain behind. All that had kept the soil from being washed down into the plains ages ago was the tenacious, deep rooted grasses that greedily seized on every square inch of soil.

An hour's halt was called while a radio beacon was installed and lunch was eaten. Then the descent down the slope was begun. In some places the going was safe and swift. In others there were cliffs of rotten stone. Often the only means of descent was to slide down ropes for a hundred feet or more. Once a cloudburst nearly washed the whole party into one of the numerous rivers.

An occasional tree began to break the monotony of the landscape. They were similar to a maple tree on Earth, and would have been classed in that family if found on Earth. Their leaves were much thicker, however, and had a soft, meaty structure not generally found in leaves of Earth plants. They were pale green in color, and translucent almost to the point of transparency.

One of the men decided to taste a leaf. In an instant, Gretta had slapped it out of his hand. Then she took a knife and split the leaf lengthwise. Hastily she pointed to minute worms crawling through the meaty fiber, and explained that these would eat through the lining of the stomach

and into the muscle tissue where they would multiply and eventually kill.

A NEW caution was born in the members of the party. They turned to Gretta with questions continually.

Ben watched her with eyes that knew her well. He noticed how her head turned often to the jungle below, and how she sniffed fearfully, as if sensing danger in the air.

Once, the wind brought the sound of drums from far away. She listened, but said nothing. To Ben the rhythm was new and held no meaning.

Finally, it was time to camp for the "night." They had been on the march for twelve hours and covered territory that would take them at least two days to retrace when they went back, if they lived to go back. There were occasional clumps of trees and camp was started in one of the larger of these small groves.

There was a strained atmosphere in the camp that hung like a physical, depressing force over all. Gretta disappeared into her tent as soon as it was set up. Ben walked to the edge of the camp where he could look down the last stretch of slope to the line of trees that marked the sharp cleavage between mountain and plain. It was no more than half a mile away now.

In his mind was no anticipation of coming events. There was only bitter cynicism. He had seen the looks in the men's eyes as Gretta possessively held his hand and marched at his side. He had sensed their reserve and contempt. Gretta had told as all women do inevitably, by look and action, that she belonged wholly and unreservedly to Ben.

Was he ashamed? He asked himself that question as his bitter eyes looked coldly down the slope. The answer was no. He was not ashamed. He was

only resentful of the hostility and contempt of those who thought he had mated with something less than human.

They had not looked at him as they might at a white man in the arms of a Negress or a Chinese, or any other of the non-white races. No. In fact, that same look had been in the eyes of the colored races in the party: the Negroes, the Chinese, the Mongols, the Hindus, the mixed breeds.

There was Joe Banks, the Negro G.I. from Chicago, who was right now helping at setting up tents. Everyone knew he was in love with Ludwiga Krato-vitsch, the Russian WAAC, and she with him, yet no one thought anything about it. In his and her eyes, that same look of contempt had arisen as he and Gretta walked, hand in loving hand.

Ben felt someone near him and turned. It was Gretta who had come out of her tent to be with him. "Why do you stand here alone?" she asked. "You have such a bitter expression. Are you regretting . . .?"

"No, Gretta," Ben said tenderly. "I am bitter because in a few short hours now we will meet your people, and then trouble begins."

"Not trouble," Gretta said, and there was a strange note in her voice. "Your people are a little people. They think little thoughts, all except you. They think that mighty ships will make our warriors fall on their bellies in fear and surrender."

"Yes," Ben said carefully. "But perhaps if your warriors will discuss things across the council room with our leaders, there need be no threats of mighty ships and bloodshed."

"YOU DON'T understand," Gretta said. "I doubt if you ever can. You see, it isn't the warriors that object. It isn't the people. It is the

Gods of Venus who will never permit you to gain a foothold here. We, the living, of Venus are taught from birth to be obedient to the dictates of the Gods through their priests. Already, many spirits of the little white people of Earth are giving the Gods trouble. I can sense it, Ben. Those white men killed on the first visit have managed to elude the traps laid for them by the priests. Now they have gathered together the spirits of those that were killed when we landed, many thousands of spirits who will fight against our Gods and be a thorn in their side."

"Nonsense!" Ben laughed. "Such things can't be."

"But they are, Ben," Gretta said earnestly. "Please believe me."

"I believe you to this extent," Ben answered slowly. "The high priests hold their power through such beliefs. Priests have held power over all the Earth through such beliefs in times past. It was only by overthrowing the powers of the priests and teaching the people so that they weren't bound by such beliefs that the priests' power was broken. Perhaps that will have to come here as it did on Earth."

"Listen!" Gretta whispered, putting her hand on Ben's arm.

The sound of drums came up the slope from the jungle. Three slow beats and a pause. Three slow beats and a pause. The last beat of each three group was louder than the other two.

"What does it mean?" Ben asked, curiously.

"It is the war signal," Gretta said. "Order your drummer to beat for peace. It won't do any good, but it may change their minds enough so that they will talk to you before fighting."

"The men have to have their sleep first," Ben said. "And you should be sleeping, too, Gretta."

"What about you?"

"I can't sleep," Ben said. "I have too much to think about."

"I know," Gretta said softly.

She stood beside him in silence for a long time. The sound of the drums came up the hill in steady cadence, a soulless voice from an alien jungle.

Finally, she broke the silence. "There is another way, Ben."

"What's that?" Ben asked sharply.

"We two could advance to meet the warriors alone," she said simply.

Ben jumped up. "Say! That is an idea!" he exclaimed. "With just me and you they would take us captive and listen to us. With the whole crowd there might be a fight, and then a lot of lives would be wasted. Maybe we can bring about peace between Venus and the Earth without the loss of a single life!"

BEN went back into camp and soon had explained the new plan to the other officers. They agreed that it was worth trying.

"Give me forty-eight hours," Ben said. "That will cover every eventuality. If I don't come back by then, go in prepared to shoot. I don't have to warn you that they are born jungle fighters."

He took the drum and practiced the peace rhythm; four light, sharp beats followed by a fifth and loud beat repeated in rapid cadence without pause. It was a very difficult rhythm to keep up without error.

By the time he was ready to start, the whole party had lined up to watch him go. His heart was light now. There was action ahead.

Troops stood at stiff attention and saluted as he passed. But their eyes were straight ahead. He searched in vain for the least sign of friendliness from the men; there was nothing but coldness.

Gretta marched by his side, lithe and graceful, her queenly head held high, her nostrils quivering at the anticipation of once again being with her own kind.

As the last soldier was lost to Ben's vision, and only the stretch of grass covered ground between him and the dark jungle ahead, unaccountably Jean's face rose before him, a trembling smile on her red lips. Once again he heard her whisper, "*I'll be waiting for you, Ben.*" His eyes blinded with tears of regret. His hands beat more fiercely on the drum. Bom bom bom bom BOM bom bom bom . . .

And Gretta marched by his side, her long shapely legs of deep indigo moving gracefully, on her beautiful face a smile of homecoming, marred only by the animal like quivering of her open nostrils. She wore cream-yellow shorts and open skirt and bra. The latest creation of a leading New York stylist made for her just before the trip to Venus.

Thus, they walked toward the distant jungle across the uneven, grass matted ground. And as they approached closer and closer, indigo skinned giants stepped cautiously into the open, holding at their sides bronze discs eight foot in diameter that acted as both shield and drum. Curiosity was on their faces as they beheld a female of their own kind approaching them with a strange pigmy.

Every step that brought the two nearer to the historic meeting, also brought more of the warriors out of the jungle, until there was a wall of them. When they were no more than ten feet from the solid rank of warriors, Gretta stopped. Ben stopped beside her, still beating on the drum. She touched his elbow and shook her head. He let his tired arms drop.

A WARRIOR stepped forward a pace and spoke. "This is all very strange," he said. "I think you had better have a good explanation or I will have to kill you right away." He looked directly at Gretta.

"The explanation is very long," Gretta said. "It will be hard to believe."

"I know about you," the warrior said. "You are the one who let herself be captured by the strange little people with beak noses and curious growths. Now you are tainted, too."

Gretta wordlessly took off her clothes and extended them toward the warrior. He drew back fearfully, but there were exclamations from the men standing behind him. Sensing his bravery was at stake, he took the clothes and turned them over in his hands.

Then, for some unaccountable reason, he went into a rage, throwing the clothes on the ground and jumping on them. The line of warriors moved swiftly to surround Ben and Gretta. With drawn knives they motioned the two to follow those in the lead, and proceeded into the jungle.

"What the . . ." Ben exclaimed in English.

"They are taking us to the priest," Gretta explained. "They are afraid to be friendly until the priest says they can. Otherwise, they might get into trouble."

This explanation cheered Ben up a little. He trotted so as to keep up with the long strides of his captors. Most of them were eight feet tall, long limbed and strongly built.

They were following a path that wound tortuously through the dense jungle growth, often almost returning upon itself as it circled the huge trunks of trees. Monkey-like animals fled through the tree tops, chattering angrily. Birds of all descriptions flew

with them, chattering sociably or scolding loudly at the disturbance.

As the warriors walked swiftly along, they beat on their huge shields. Perhaps they were signalling ahead of their coming.

A snake whose body was two feet in diameter and whose length was lost in the trees above, dropped its head curiously to watch. It made no motion to attack, even though several of the warriors brushed against its mouth as they passed. Its mottled green skin was smooth and seemed to have no scales like the snakes on Earth.

Over an hour passed before they reached the log walled enclosure of the village. Without pause, the warriors entered the wide gateway and walked between rows of thatched huts to a larger structure in the center of the enclosure. Their tempo did not falter. They reminded Ben vaguely of ants who go through complicated maneuvers by instinct, and without the ability to alter one detail of action.

GRETTA and Ben were thrust forward, and the warriors formed a solid line in front of the dark entrance to the large thatched building. Not until the last man had reached his place in the line did the beating on the bronze shields cease. Then, as if at some signal, utter silence descended like a blow.

Ben looked curiously into the darkness of the doorway. He could see nothing inside. Minutes passed. Gretta stood passively where she had been thrust, her head slightly bent, but back erect. Ben watched her, trying to catch her eye.

A dry, cracked voice sounded from the doorway. "So," it said, "the strange animal from another world admires the beauty of the female of this planet."

Ben's head jerked back to the entrance. A queer monstrosity now stood

there. Nearly ten feet tall, the shrivelled, skeleton-like figure wrapped in brittle blue black parchment skin with deep folds, wrinkles, and blemishes was indescribably ugly. The large head rested on a fragile neck. The eyes were deep sunken and one of them was a uniformly evil yellow with no iris.

The warriors fell on their faces and moaned softly. Gretta dropped gracefully to her knees and prostrated herself.

"I come in peace," Ben said. He felt helpless, and dared say no more until he found out their reaction.

"If you come in peace," the priest said dryly, "then go in peace, and take all of your kind with you. In peace you cannot remain unless we invite you to remain, and we will never do that."

"On our world," Ben said haltingly choosing his words carefully, "the priests are all powerful just as you are here. I am only a slave. I must obey. It is their command that I talk peace with you because they will come whether you wish it or not, and would prefer to come in peace."

The priest walked over to Gretta and touched her side with sandalled foot. "Arise, my child," he said. "You have been to the world this creature comes from?"

"Yes," she answered.

"And do you find it pleasing?" the priest persisted.

"This creature is my mate," Gretta said simply. "I chose him of my own will."

Immediately, there was an uproar. From all sides, an angry thunder of voices swelled.

The priest held up his band for silence. When the voices died down, he turned his eyes to stare piercingly at Ben. "Do the high priests of your world approve of this mating?" he asked.

"They do," Ben answered. "They desire to know if the blood of the two worlds can mix."

HE LOOKED into the priest's eyes, holding all thought from consciousness by a supreme effort of will. He was waiting, waiting for that look that had been in the eyes of his own kind. He knew it would come. This race in many ways had more reason to be proud of its heritage than any on Earth. He held his hands limply at his sides, waiting for whatever might come.

It came unexpectedly. The priest made a strange sound. Immediately, Ben was seized from behind and held securely. The wizened old man stepped close, drawing one of the knives from his collection around his waist.

With sickening horror, Ben watched him make a slit in his forearm with the point of the knife, and deftly peel back a square inch of Ben's skin. Shock prevented him from feeling any pain. Next, the priest opened a small leather bag at his waist and took out a small object that looked somewhat like an acorn. This object he pressed into the muscle tissue exposed, and pulled the flap of skin back into place. It was done so quickly and in such a matter of fact manner that Ben's mind refused to accept the evidence of his senses.

Someone appeared with a handful of something that looked like mud. The priest took this and slapped it over the wound. A long strip of thin leather appeared. He wrapped this around Ben's arm, then tied it in place with strands of grass.

Ben's vision was blurring. He looked vaguely around and was dimly conscious of Gretta, crumpled on the ground, her shoulders shaking with deep sobs. Numbness spread through his arm into his body. He could no

longer see. And as the numbness spread, his mind seemed to become alert and strangely apart from the body.

He seemed to stand suspended beside his body, unable to feel, unable to see, yet preternaturally awake and aware.

He seemed to be waiting for something. He marvelled at his patience. He knew he could go on waiting, perhaps for centuries, just this way, without even wondering what it was he waited for, without caring.

SLOWLY things began to form about him. He was on board ship. An officer was talking.

"All right, men," the officer was saying, "when your ears pop, you don't have time to think. Open your mouth wide. The first indication you will have that a compartment is punctured is the popping of your ears." A split second later will come the sounds of the strike that poked the hole in the shell. If you don't get your mouth open, your drums will explode outward, your sinus cavities will pop open, and you will strangle on the sudden gush of blood from the torn tissue. You have to get your reaction time down to a tenth of a second. We'll go over it again and again—and again—and . . .

Once again he waited, alone in the cosmos, and uncurious.

Clouds swirled in purposive pattern, materializing.

Huge road building machines were tearing a path through jungles. They piled trees up in piles as large as buildings. They ploughed the earth and graded it. They moved slowly, leaving ribbons of concrete behind them. They crept slowly forward, and behind them crawled ant-like ribbons of armored cars, troops, and loaded trucks.

A band of Venusian warriors burst

from the jungle in a desperate attack. Young men in brown trousers and shirts squirted liquid fire at them. The warriors ran screaming into the jungle, evil gobs of burning yellow clinging to their indigo skins, eating—eating . . .

Things changed abruptly. He seemed to be floating in the air above the plateau where all the chick ships were. He could see far down the mountain side. The mists were gone.

Parts of the hillside seemed to be moving stealthily. He looked closer and saw that it was masses of Venusian warriors covered with cloaks of grasses and leaves, stealing up in a surprise attack.

Now the men in the camp below had seen them. They unhurriedly wheeled machine guns to the edge of the plateau and waited for the advancing warriors to get nearer. Here and there was a circle of men playing dice while they waited, one of their number occasionally peeking over the edge of the hill to see how much nearer the warriors had climbed.

With a final spurt of energy, a wave of warriors threw off the grass covering and lifted their shields in front of them, beating their war song on the bronze disks.

"Take 'em, kid," a man holding the dice said.

Another man stepped to the machine gun and sent a blistering spatter of lead into the advancing ranks of Venusians. They fell and formed a wall of newly dead, a barrier over which the rear ranks stumbled and fell before themselves becoming a part of it.

Then the man at the gun rejoined the group playing dice.

"It's about time," the other man said. "What took you so long? Your dice." He handed the dice to the one who had just killed a couple of thousand Venusians.

Ben seemed to be drawing closer to the plateau. His course became purposive. He was looking for Captain Ley. He found him in a large concrete room with several other officers wearing general's uniforms. They were sitting around a massive table in the center of the room.

One of the generals was talking. He sat with one heel hooked onto the edge of the table, his chair tipped back.

"No report of Ben Arnold getting back to the party yet," he said grumbly. "I hate this waiting. Why don't we go in and take over. Sooner or later we have to wipe out the blue boys. It might as well be now."

"We're pinning our hopes on Ben," Georges Ley said. "Poor kid. He's been handed a mighty raw deal in all this. But it had to be. If they accept him as one of them, as a sort of tin horn god, so to speak, we can manage them through him until we are in a position to dictate without bloodshed. The public back home won't stand for a mass slaughter like they used to a few centuries ago. I'm against it myself. I think that if we can't win them over with friendship, we should go home and forget about Venus."

"Ha!" another officer snorted. "Can't you just picture the human race steering clear of a whole planet, just because the savage natives on it didn't want us to land! Imagine Columbus going back to the queen of Spain with the story that he couldn't find any place for rent in the new world!"

The generals around the big table started to laugh. Their laughter grew until it thundered down the side of the mountain and shook the trees in the jungle, and monkey-like creatures crept under sickly leaves to hide.

The laughter retreated and once again Ben was alone, waiting, and not caring.

Time passed until it had no meaning. A century or an eon seemed no different. A planet could be born, bear its myriads of creatures, and become an airless, lifeless world. A minute insect could flutter its wings for a fraction of an instant. And there would be no way to tell which time was the longer.

The jungle of evil white blotches, sickly greens, yellows, and reds stretched out on all sides. A hundred yards away long indigo legs flashed briefly. A graceful female Venusian woman was trotting along a path. By her side keeping pace in clumsy gallop was a strange child, long of limb, hairless, covered with a sickly white skin with strange bluish blotches. Its nose was a huge beak, its mouth was weak and petulant.

The Venusian woman was Gretta.

She came to a village. Women ran out and drove her away with sticks. She ran off into the jungle, bleeding from the wounds she had received, her child stumbling along at her side, whimpering.

She came to a concrete building in the jungle. Stumbling with weakness, she crept up to the door and knocked. Unwaacs came out and pushed her. She stumbled and fell. The girls picked up sticks and pebbles and threw them at her until she crawled into the jungle.

There she fell, and the mottled creature that was her son crept up and suckled at her breast as would a young animal.

Ben watched and marveled that he could have no feeling. He tried to tell himself that this was his son, and the words had no meaning for him.

The scene was fading, slipping.

WITH the force of an explosion, sound burst upon his ears and light upon his eyes. A thousand sensa-

tions from his body told him that he was again himself. The damp fetid smell of the jungle was in his nose, and the melody of jungle noises formed a carpet of sound for other and meaningful noises to lay on.

He opened his eyes. He was lying on the ground. In front of him was a raised platform of some kind of stone, elevated about two feet above the surrounding ground.

Twisting his head, he could see on either side of the platform a long line of tall warriors, each holding his huge shield behind him so that it seemed to form a picture of which he was the center.

A moaning hum began behind him. He twisted his head as far around as he could and saw the front ranks of what seemed to be a huge throng of prostrate, indigo colored people, on their knees with their hands outstretched in front of them, their faces bent downward.

There was a crash of sound that made him jerk his head back toward the platform. The hundreds of blows on the bronze shields struck in unison; the sound ended abruptly.

From the kneeling throng, a sigh of worship rose into the air. Ben himself uttered a faint exclamation of awe. Standing in the center of the raised platform of stone was a man, perfectly proportioned, with skin of glistening blue marble. He was at least ten feet tall, and on his head was a jewelled headdress of rubies, each of which seemed to be a living eye of red.

The mouth of this giant was generous and firm. There was a scar across one cheek. The eyes were alive and seemed to be twinkling with amusement.

There was a rustle of movement behind Ben. Several figures were crawling around and past him toward the

man on the dais. One of them was the wrinkled old priest to whom Ben had been taken by the warriors.

These who were crawling forward were intoning words in a singsong voice. "Oh incarnate God of heat and light, Oh Ruler of the heavens and the lands of Venus. We have called You forth to advise us in our present need. Speak and we shall obey."

They intoned this over and over again, while the giant figure remained motionless. Each time they intoned it, they crept a little closer to the base of the platform. Finally, they became motionless and silent.

THE giant waited, seeming to enjoy the dramatic moment of suspense he was creating. Then he spoke, softly, yet with a voice that seemed to carry without diminution to vast distances.

"When the giant she-snake desires to eat of the fast, sharp toothed tree monkeys, she does not pursue them through the tree tops. She can strike swiftly, yes. She can run as fast as they, yes. Yet why should she pursue them when she can change, seemingly, into a comfortable nest in which they can cuddle in comfort and sleep? Should you not be as wise as the giant she-snake?"

There were excited mutterings from the prostrated priests, but they did not rise. When their mutterings died into silence, the giant spoke again.

"When the cannibal ants devour a nest of other ants, they do not pursue them one by one and overcome them. They join them and live with them, cunningly surrounding them with traps, and waiting for the day when they can snare them all without effort. In that way, a handful of weak cannibal ants can overcome countless numbers of strong, dangerous stinger ants with no danger to themselves. Can you not

profit by what your eyes bring to you in the jungle around you? Why come to me and disturb my bliss with your childish lack of sense? Go rather to the ant and the snake. Ask them what you should do."

"But how shall we begin?" a priest muttered.

"How indeed?" the giant mocked. "Let this tethered animal who has defiled your blood be your king." He laughed witheringly, then turned and vanished into the jungle in two long strides.

Immediately, there arose a babble of voices as the priests and gathered people discussed what had been said. The priests put their heads together. Finally, one of them jumped up on the stone platform and raised his hands. The storm of voices died down.

"Hear me," he shouted. "It has been ordered and we must obey. The white animal must be our king. It is a holy command."

In the priest's eyes was a light of glee and triumph. It was seen by the people, who shouted their agreement loudly.

Hands were fumbling at Ben's hack. The things that hound him were loosened and he was lifted to his feet and led to the platform. He felt himself pushed up and then he stood swaying, his limbs tingling as circulation began in them.

From somewhere, a crown similar to the one the giant had worn appeared and was planted on Ben's head. Then he was standing alone, the priests and the people facing him as they had the giant.

"Oh king of Venus," the priests chanted. "Command and we obey."

Ben stared in unbelief. This was more fantastic than the wildest dreams of madness. An inspiration hit him. He would call their bluff and force their

hand. He would pretend he believed their little game and give them an order they wouldn't obey. That would end this farce.

"Then kill this wizened priest who dared to touch me," he ordered imperiously, pointing to the priest he had first met at the large hut.

"Mercy, oh king," the old man moaned.

"Kill him!" Ben shouted. They would never do it! He had called their bluff and exposed their trick.

Then his senses reeled. Three of the other priests turned toward the man Ben had ordered killed. There was a flash of movement, and the man lay dying, three knives sunk to their hilts in his body. In a moment he was dead.

"He is a true king!" someone shouted.

"A king fit to lead us!" another echoed.

Before Ben's numbed senses could clear, he had been picked up and was being carried on the shoulders of two warriors, who ran swiftly along the path through the jungle, surrounded by other warriors.

THINGS happened too speedily for Ben to catch up. He was taken to a large thatch building with many rooms, and told that it was his palace. Gretta was brought to him. There were bruises and cuts on her. Priests were hatching her hurts and covering them with mud poultices.

A group of warriors came in, herding a group of women and men who immediately fell on their knees and began moaning. The warriors, grinning pleasantly, cut their throats expertly, too quickly for Ben to prevent it or even make a sound. Then a priest apologetically explained that these were the culprits who had touched Gretta.

Bewildered, Ben could think of noth-

ing to do or say. The damage was done. He needed time to think. He ordered the room cleared. Then he ordered the house cleared. At last he was alone with Gretta. She was in bad shape. No bones were broken, but she had been unmercifully beaten and stoned.

Ben sank to the ground beside her and took her head in his arms, holding it close to his chest. She looked up at him and smiled wanly.

He wanted to ask her what it all meant, but decided he had better wait until she was feeling better. Clumsily, he helped her to a mat of grass that served as a bed. She sank down on it gratefully, closing her eyes. He sat at the edge of her bed, and tried to bring order out of chaos in his thoughts. He finally gave it up and went to sleep.

He opened his eyes to the sound of girlish giggles and chattering. A grass mat had been lain over the dirt floor of the room. A large hollowed out section of log rested on this and was filled with water.

Gretta reclined in this primitive tub, surrounded by half a dozen girlish Venusians who were bathing her body and exclaiming over her beauty, obviously vying with one another to get in her good graces.

Ben watched them without moving, his mind picking up the memories of yesterday, trying to make some sense out of them.

So he was king of Venus! It must be so. The Venusians had killed one of their priests at his command. They had killed several of their own kind who had beaten Gretta. Actions speak.

The mysterious giant who sneered at these people had ordered them to make him king, and they had done so without hesitation.

His mind churned this over. The possibilities opened up rapidly. As king of Venus he could keep peace. He

could "receive" the Earth expedition and make a treaty that would allow peaceful expansion, road building, education of the natives, and everything else that should be done.

It was wonderful, if true. But his mind kept whispering that he was only dreaming all this.

Gretta saw that he was awake. She stepped out of her bath and ordered fresh water with just a trace of the imperious in her voice. She, at least, accepted the apparent fact of her position as queen of Venus.

One of the girls ran to the doorway and shouted commands. A dozen men came in and picked up the log tub and carried it out, returning almost instantly with another full of fresh water.

Laughing at his vociferous protests, the girls pulled off Ben's clothes and lifted him into the tub. The water was soapy and perfumed. He resigned himself to enjoying the bath.

Afterward, when he had put his clothes back on, Gretta informed him that the council of priests were waiting for him in the council circle. He started toward the door. Gretta called him back and rescued his crown from where it lay on the grass bed. She put it on his head, a strange smile on her lips, lights dancing in her eyes.

He felt like a man who had just been promoted to foreman of the shop on the morning after, as his wife kisses him goodbye and he starts for the streetcar line. In this case, the streetcar line was a double row of indigo skinned warriors, two of whom carried him on their shoulders, trotting in such perfect unison that he could almost relax. He reached one hand up and set his crown of priceless rubies at a jaunty angle.

THE council of priests was a bigger affair than he had expected. It

seemed that during the time he had slept, runners had gone to all corners of the entire continent and brought back the priests of all the tribes. There were thousands of them.

When Ben appeared, they prostrated themselves, chanting some ritual that they evidently knew by heart, since they all spoke in unison. Ben waited patiently for them to finish. He felt quite foolish about the whole thing.

Finally, the assembly finished their chant and settled back on their haunches, very much like a meeting on Earth. Ben began to enjoy himself. So far as he could tell, they were entirely sincere in their making him king, fantastically unbelievable though it was.

He decided to push things as fast as possible. He told them of his plan to make a treaty between the Venusians and the Earth expedition. They listened gravely while he painted a picture of the advantages that would accrue to them from having modern civilization descend into their midst.

When he finished, one of the priests rose and suggested that he appoint a group to study what should go into a treaty with the Earth group. Ben began to feel at ease. Committees made the whole thing seem so natural. The meeting ended with the decision to send a guard of honor with Ben back to the waiting exploration party, and instruct them to return to the home base in the Sierra Corcatehs with a message that a treaty would be drawn up, and a meeting to conclude the treaty would be held within a week.

GEORGES LEY was reading a copy of the proposed treaty as drawn up by the Venusians and relayed up to the plateau by radio from the advance base in the clump of trees a half mile from the edge of the jungle. In

some ways it was quite peculiar. In others it was just what they would have suggested themselves. For example, the committee of priests agreed that they were to occupy and improve areas which they themselves laid out, chosen from areas that the priests had selected. Certain areas were to be strictly taboo to the Earthmen. The penalty of death was to be imposed on any Earthman caught in those taboo areas.

That was a little hard to take, but Georges knew that after the Earth occupation forces had established themselves, time would nullify such provisions of the treaty.

Georges could see Ben's hand in one provision, that all punishment of Earthmen was to be strictly under the jurisdiction of unarmy courts, and all punishment of Venusians was to be under jurisdiction of the priests, although Earthmen could sit in review of any case they wished.

There was only one really amazing thing in the proposed treaty as drawn up by the Venusians. This concerned Ben Arnold. The Earthmen must officially recognize Ben as king of Venus. It was to go into the treaty that for the rest of Ben's life he was to be subject to no law on either the Earth or Venus. He could be tried by no court on Earth or Venus or anyplace else for any crime whatever. Even if there were war between the Venusians and the Earthmen at any time, Ben was still to be above the law.

Ben had added a comment of his own to this clause in the treaty. "I don't know what to make of this clause," he had written. "The council of priests flatly state that without that clause they will not consider a treaty of any kind, but will fight to the last Venusian. I think it is dictated by some kind of a sense of prestige. If their king is absolutely inviolate, he is really a

king. Otherwise not. The whole thing is mysterious. They were all for killing me until some giant Venusian ten feet tall, whom I haven't seen since, ordered them to make me king. Actually, all the clause will mean is that I get kicked out of unarmy status, and can break traffic laws with impunity when you get a few good roads built. I don't plan on going back to the Earth and murdering my grandmother! But if I did, the treaty would protect me. No court would try me for it."

Georges chewed on the stem of his pipe and considered every angle. The treaty as proposed by the Venusians was entirely fair: more than fair, really, because it contained the loopholes that any smart diplomat would have included if the treaty were drawn up by his own side. Soldiers caught in taboo areas were to be executed, but they were to be tried by unarmy courts rather than Venusian courts, making it possible to get around the letter of the treaty.

A few months of intense effort in road building and distributing their forces over the continent would make any effective uprising of the native population impossible. Then, the power of the priesthood could be undermined. Clothes would help to do that. They appealed to people's vanity, and would become a ready means for getting native labor. In a few years, education could begin. In a century the natives of Venus could be educated into full partnership in the United Nations.

There were a few minor matters that puzzled him. Who was the ten foot Venusian? What was his power? There had been king makers on Earth in the old days. Generally, they wielded the power behind the throne. Did this king maker of Venus have some idea of doing the same? It wouldn't really matter if he did, so long as everything

remained peaceful.

Finally, Georges placed his signature at the bottom of the sheet to signify his acceptance of the treaty, and rang for a messenger to take it to the next officer on the list of those who were to study it.

BEN strode purposefully along the gloomy corridor formed by the dripping vegetation that hemmed in the jungle path. Behind him, following doglike, was the stooped figure of the native priest that had in some way attached himself to Ben and become his guide and mentor. He had proven so invaluable that Ben had never thought of questioning him too closely on why he seemed to have been chosen to the post of adviser to the king.

In fact, Ben had early decided to "play along" to a large extent, rather than assert himself too much, as long as things worked smoothly. His first "command" to kill a priest, which he had not dreamed would be carried out, had been obeyed so swiftly that he was almost afraid to give a command again.

He was even afraid to express displeasure, because those who displeased him had a habit of draping their corpses where he couldn't avoid seeing them a few hours later.

The Earth "invasion" was going along smoothly. The giant roadbuilding machinery had begun the descent from the plateau even before the ratified treaty had been returned from the Earth, where it had been taken by the mother ship. As the giant machines slowly wended their way down the mountainside, they left a smooth highway behind them over which an endless procession of trucks from the cement plant rolled day and night.

Ahead of this advance front had gone surveyors, guiding and marking the

course that the behemoth was to follow. Native Venusians appeared by the hundreds, ready to join in the gigantic undertaking.

By the time the highway reached the edge of the jungle, there were nearly as many natives as Earthmen at work. The natives proved extremely intelligent. Unarmy soldiers who had been pressed into duty as truck drivers and mechanics were replaced by the tall, indigo skinned natives. A system of pidgin English had been worked out, so that natives and Earthmen could converse well enough to get along. There had not been a single untoward incident to mar the smooth advance.

And gradually Ben forgot the strange Venusian giant and what he had said to the gathering of natives while Ben lay bound and helpless. When he remembered it at all, he shrugged off the memory. If it had had any original meaning, that meaning was now lost.

The Earth forces held together and played things safe. There would never be a chance for the natives to waylay the entire group and wipe them out. Headquarters remained on the plateau, inaccessible except by way of the highway which was guarded day and night. Concrete garrisons were constructed along the highway and kept manned by large contingents, in case of trouble.

There was no trouble, and gradually everyone relaxed. Cities were laid out and houses built. Earth troops moved into the houses and took the natives who eagerly asked for work as servants.

Gradually, Ben's interest turned from the smoothly operating projects to a study of the taboo areas and the native religion. He alone of all the Earthmen was permitted to roam freely. Long talks with his former superiors in the unarmy had convinced him that his duty to the world and to Venus was more important than his private life.

HE KEPT notes on everything he learned about Venusian life and customs. The notes were swelling, and by the time the Earth approached close to Venus again, so that the chick boats could make a return trip, he would have completed the first authoritative work on Venus history, religion, and custom.

The most interesting phase of his study was Venus religion. The priests had been rulers, scientists, and teachers for countless generations. Ben was far from a scientist, but he had read many books that gave him a broad conception of history and science.

He remembered something in one book, "The Decline of the West" by Oswald Spengler. In that, Spengler had described a little of the "civilization" of the Australian natives who invented the boomerang. He had commented that the type of thinking that resulted in the boomerang was unlike that which gave rise to analytic geometry, for example, and that if the native Australians had been allowed to develop in isolation until they reached a peak of civilization, that culture would probably have given rise to a science, mathematics, art, and philosophy unlike any other on Earth.

The Venus civilization was very like that. Their science was a strange thing. Whereas Earth science had developed from materialism and was forcing its way into psychology, Venus science had had its roots in a superscience of psychology and study of the mind, and from that base was spreading slowly into the material side of life.

Ben was learning. He was learning things which the Venusian priests considered elementary, and which Ben knew were just being discovered on Earth—things about the mind, its powers and capabilities. He was on his way to such a lesson now, as he hastened along the jungle path.

The path ended at the edge of a large clearing in the heart of one of the taboo areas. This clearing was the only spot Ben had encountered where the natives cultivated plants. Their foods grew in wild profusion. There was no need for farms and gardens on Venus. Yet here, in the forty acres surrounding the rambling lamasary in the center, a well kept garden of flowers and beautiful trees flourished. Well tended paths laid out in straight lines and graceful curves wound among the flower beds. None of the plants here grew wild in the jungles, so far as Ben had been able to discover. He was sure that some of them could not grow wild. They didn't produce seeds from the blooms.

It was a strange mystery spot that fascinated Ben. The priests here were the only natives of Venus he had seen that habitually wore clothes, long robes of homespun wool from a sheep-like animal that roamed wild in the occasional natural meadows that appeared in the jungle.

THE high priest was called Ung, and Ben couldn't decide whether this was his name or a title. The life of the lamasary revolved around Ung. The lesser priests spent most of their time prostrate on the ground within listening distance of the high priest Ung. When Ung moved to some spot where they couldn't hear, they would rise slightly and sidle along in a manner that gave the impression they had not risen at all.

They never lifted their faces or spoke in the presence of Ung. Hence, although there were always many present when Ben was there, it always seemed that there was only Ben himself, Ung, and the nameless priest who had become Ben's shadow, and who also prostrated himself as soon as he

arrived.

As Ben stepped into the clearing, he saw Ung walking slowly along one of the paths in the garden. Ung saw him at the same time and waved a cheery greeting. He stood still until Ben reached him, idly admiring a large orchid-like, bright red flower that he had picked.

"Good morning, Ben," Ung greeted him in Venusian. "I see by your purposive air that you have something definite on your mind today. But that can wait. I must finish my obligation to the nature world, and accept the gifts offered through me to the Gods of Venus."

Ung continued his walk, stopping occasionally to examine a flower. If it satisfied his critical eye, he picked it. When he had gathered a dozen different flowers, he turned toward the building. Ben walked beside him silently.

"Nature worships the Gods just as man does," Ung said to Ben as they neared the lamasary. "In some ways, she does so more humbly. Man offers only imperfection. Nature patiently creates millions of things so that the one perfect production can be offered."

They entered the building and crossed the large room which was the only one Ben had ever been in.

"Come," Ung said. "Today I will let you partake of the ceremony of offering gifts to the Gods."

Together they entered a smaller room, perhaps twenty feet square. Ben could not hold back his exclamation of surprise. In the four corners of the room were four huge idols. They were not the crude statues usually found in such places on Earth. Rather, they were so perfect in their carvings that they might have been frozen from living forms.

Each was a Venusian, ten feet high. Each wore a crown of gold densely

studded with huge rubies. Yet, only two of them had the dark indigo coloring of the living Venusian. The third was carved from pure gold, brightly polished. The fourth was of some flawless white material that glistened like pearl. There seemed to be an aura about each that made it seem alive.

Ben looked at the statues closely. Only one of the figures was imperfect. It was one of the indigo colored pair. It had what seemed to be a scar on one cheek.

Ben's senses swam. This, unless he were going mad, was an exact replica of the giant that had appeared on the raised platform and ordered him made king of Venus!

He looked half fearfully into the godlike face of the idol. The eyes seemed to look deeply into his own, sardonically, amused at his confused thoughts.

Ben tore his gaze from the statue and turned to see what Ung was doing.

UNG WAS standing before a carved stand in the center of the room that looked like it might have been designed as a drinking fountain. Instead of water spouting from it, a pale blue flame hovered over it. The flame must have gained its fuel from some opening in the pedestal, yet there seemed no opening and the flame itself did not come closer than an inch to the center of the large bowl in which it lived.

Ben looked carefully at the flame. It was shaped somewhat like a teardrop, large and globular at the base, rising to a point. Its outlines were almost sharp. It wavered slightly and seemed to vibrate rapidly. It was nearly transparent, an almost colorless blue.

He decided it must be a gas flame, the gas cleverly fed into the flame from minute orifices too small to see unless one bent closely and looked for them.

Ung took one of the flowers he held in his arms. He passed it slowly into the flame. As the flame touched it, it disappeared at that spot. Almost studiously, Ung pushed it further into the flame, until with a final flick he sent the last bit of the stem into it.

The flower had completely disappeared, leaving not a trace of ash. The flame had colored slightly while consuming the flower, but immediately resumed its light blue shade.

One after another, Ung fed the flowers to the flame. They all vanished in the same way. As the last bit of stem vanished in the flame, a drum began to beat somewhere outside the room. Or had it been beating all the time, and only risen to consciousness in Ben's mind as the last flower disappeared? He didn't know.

Expressionlessly, Ung turned and walked toward the door through which they had entered.

Ben took a last look around. The faces of the four idols looked down at him, godlike and serene; young yet infinitely old, and their expressions alive with something undefinable. The living flame floated in its place, as alive as the four statues.

The sound of the drum seemed to stand stationary in the air, a part of the room. Ben had a queer feeling that he could reach out and gather that sound into his arms, that it would have weight and solidity like an object.

He stepped past the waiting Ung into the outer room and went over to the stone seat he always occupied while listening to the words of the priest. Ung sat down opposite him, his eyes studying the Earthman's face. He began talking, his voice low and hypnotic.

"The cosmos is One," he began. "Yet, strangely, there is an infinity of possible cosmoses, and the One was faced with an insurmountable problem.

Its Destiny was to enfold All within its bosom. Yet, how could the One that IS enfold the ALL that IS NOT?"

UNG STOPPED talking. He swayed back and forth slowly, his eyes closed. He seemed either to be waiting for an answer to his question from Ben, or to have forgotten that he had said anything. Ben tried to decide which was the case. He was almost on the point of speaking when Ung began to talk again.

"The answer is simple, although it took an infinity of time to discover it," he said. "A mind is the answer. A mind is a cosmos within the Cosmos, separate and independent of its Creator."

"I can see that," Ben said thoughtfully. "For a long time on the Earth, philosophers argued as to whether the Cosmos exists. The most they could conclude is that it is impossible to prove it exists, and that each individual mind must make its own assumption that the Cosmos does exist."

"Yes," Ung said. "Even on the Earth it is recognized that the individual mind is a cosmos in itself, logically isolated from the One which gave it being by an unbridgable abyss. All logic is in the last analysis induction, and all Law is in the last analysis facts of the jewel called probability."

"The logicians of Earth would dispute that statement," Ben said laughingly. "They have a well developed branch of logic called deductive logic, whose conclusions are certain, following from the premises, of course."

"I am acquainted with this phase of thought," Ung said calmly. "It is illusory. Every simplest conclusion determined by deduction rests on a minimum of four inductive conclusions. Before even those four inductions can be made that make possible a simple deductive

step, before they can be even formulated by the mind, several thousands of inductive conclusions must be reached by the thinking mind. Deduction is at best the timorous step of a blind idiot tottering on the edge of the Pit, and the ground crumbles beneath his feet if he pauses even for a moment in his journey."

"That's a very gloomy picture," Ben said. "If we can't trust deductive conclusions, what becomes of our certainties? And, when you get right down to it, are you sure that your conclusion that deduction is as precarious as induction is not an incorrect inference you have formed?"

"There are only certainties within the bounds of your own particular cosmos," Ung said. "In your youth, you go through the stage of mental growth in which you dispute the existence of things that are beyond your senses at the moment. You form a theory that a certain object exists only when you see it or feel it, and conveniently ceases to have existence when it passes from your immediate awareness. As you grow older, you outgrow this child theory, yet in outgrowing it you are turning your back on one of the most fundamental truths of metaphysics, for the object DOES NOT EXIST except WHEN you are aware of it."

"Oh, come now, Ung," Ben laughed. "Are you trying to tell me that when I turn my back on you and walk down the path I came here on, you will vanish and have no existence until I return tomorrow?"

"That is precisely what I mean," Ung said, seriously.

"Ob, come now," Ben repeated. He suspected Ung was pulling his leg.

"You can't see it?" Ung asked, sadly. "I know you could see the truth of that when you were no more than a child. Why can't you see it now?"

"Because it simply isn't true," Ben replied uncomfortably.

"I see," Ung said. "I am beginning to understand the basic fallacy upon which Earth civilization rests. It seemed inconceivable that so many countless individuals in so many generations, on a planet as large as Venus and in some ways more favored, could each discover the solid ground of metaphysics and then turn his back on it for the rest of his life. Yet I see that that must be the case."

HE STARED thoughtfully past Ben, through the doorway into the garden outside. "I wonder," he said musingly.

"You wonder what?" Ben prompted.

"I wonder if the animals and insects of your planet do the same?" He smiled apologetically. "Pardon the seeming affront to your race, Ben. I have never seen a living thing from Earth except its intelligent species. Here on Venus, we study the animals and insects and learn their philosophies and try to understand them. Do you do that on Earth?"

"Animals and insects on Earth have never shown the ability to reason, so far as I know," Ben answered.

"There you go again," Ung laughed good naturedly. "You put so much store in reasoning. You make it the criterion of ability to draw conclusions and formulate theories."

"Isn't it?" Ben asked in surprise.

"Of course not," Ung said emphatically.

"Either you are so far off the track that I can't find you," Ben said good naturedly, "or I'm so far off the track that I can't follow you. Which is it? Don't answer. I know what you think."

Ung threw back his head and laughed heartily. "Let me ask you a question that may seem off the track of what

we have been talking about, Ben, but really isn't," Ung said. Then, at Ben's nod, "Is there anything in your mind that you are perpetually aware of? Let me put it in the form of an analogy. You believe that I exist during the time you are not aware of me. You believe my existence continues uninterrupted from day to day even though you are with me only an hour or two at a time. You could sit there and keep your eyes on me for as long as you could stay awake, and thus keep me continually in your sphere of awareness. Is there any thought or memory that remains within that sphere of awareness continually?"

"No," Ben said. "Not unless you mean that I am aware I am thinking."

"I don't mean that," Ung said. "Take the sound of the drum you hear."

"That's right," Ben exclaimed. "The drum has been beating all this time and I have been aware of it without really thinking about it. It started when we were in the other room and has been going ever since, yet I became so used to it that I stopped being consciously aware of it, until you drew my attention to it."

"IF YOU will permit," Ung said, "I'd like to try something with you. It will be a sort of experiment to help you understand what I mean. I doubt if you will be able to understand Venusian science until you get past the first stumbling blocks that your own civilization has built into your mental makeup."

"What sort of experiment?" Ben asked, amused.

"I want to plant the sound of that drum in your mind as a mental OBJECT," Ung said. "It won't be too difficult. It will give us something to build on as we go along. You'll get used to it, just as you're used to having a

body. You're intelligent. You have the ability to understand the things I must teach you, but not the groundwork from which we must start."

He studied Ben intently for a moment. "I see in your mind that you are attempting to write a book that will give the Earth an understanding of Venus. If you are to succeed in your chosen task, you must gain a true insight into our ways of thinking. If you will permit me to do as I wish, it will help you in a way that nothing else can."

"Go ahead," Ben said. He felt flattered, for some reason he couldn't fathom.

"It will take what you call hypnosis," Ung said. "I'll have to put you to sleep."

"That's all you will do when you have me hypnotized?" Ben asked, somewhat alarmed.

"That's all," Ung said. "Just plant the sound of the drum the way it is beating now. That sound will continue in your conscious mind and become a part of your consciousness forever." His voice had subtly altered. His eyes were peering intently into Ben's. "It will repeat itself over and over, always the same, always there," he went on, slowly and musically. "Just as you hear it now, so it will always be. Always sounding, always in your consciousness. It will be the One foundation of all thought for you, eternally beating in the same rhythm, never changing. You will be able to hold it in the center of consciousness and make it swell in volume until it is deafening. Yet, never can you destroy it. It will always be there."

Ben's head gave a sudden jerk. He opened his eyes. Ung was talking.

"I'm sorry, Ung," Ben interrupted. "I fell asleep for just a second. What were you saying?"

"How long were you asleep?" Ung asked, smiling.

"Let's see," Ben frowned, trying to remember. A light of comprehension dawned on his face. "You hypnotized me!"

Ung nodded. "That's right. You've now taken the first step on the long path to understanding the Venusian mind."

"Just as simple as that," Ben laughed. "I didn't even know it was happening."

"Just as simple as that," Ung echoed. "And now there is nothing more we can do until tomorrow." He rose with an air of dismissal.

Ben retraced his steps through the garden to the jungle path, his indigo skinned shadow following him silently.

The beat of a drum followed him. He listened to it and it grew louder. He tried to change it and it defied all efforts, just as any external sound would.

In some ways it was a comforting sound. Soothing. He remembered the strange quality it had had in the room of the flame, solidity. This was not the same. Fluidity described it more accurately. It was like the waves on an infinite sea beating against the shores of consciousness.

THE DAYS passed swiftly. The time was coming when Venus and Earth would be in favorable positions for the chick ships to make the return trip to Earth.

Ben was happy with Gretta. Happier than he had ever dreamed he could be. His daily visit with Ung and his manuscript occupied most of his time. Occasionally Georges Ley would drop around and spend a few hours. He would talk of things going on in the unarmy projects, so that Ben had a fair picture of how far things had advanced.

Rich mineral deposits had been un-

covered in many places. There were two large oil fields in operation. A cracking plant provided more than enough gasoline for all the motorized equipment. Things were being built on a permanent basis, and it looked as if Venus would become a paradise for both the Earth population and the natives in a few short years.

Then, one morning, Ben woke up with a strange feeling that something was different. He lay in bed trying to decide what it was. He listened to the sounds of the jungle outside: the ever-present crackling sound of rapid growth, the occasional crash of a tree falling in the distance, the chatter of birds and the cries of tree animals that hung around the village. They were the same.

He listened to the sound of the drum beat in his mind. It was as it should be. The temperature of the air was the same it always was. The odors of the jungle and the village were as they had always been.

He shrugged off the strange feeling. Unless he had come down with some disease, there seemed to be no reason for it.

Getting up, he went to the doorway of his "palace," a concrete building that had been built for him. He felt tired, exhausted. Yet he had slept well. He couldn't remember even having a dream.

His eyes blurred a little. He raised his hand to rub them. There was some sort of smear on his hand. He looked at it. It was a smear of dried blood. He frowned and mentally analyzed his body feelings to see if he felt hurt anywhere. He didn't. He went back to the sleeping figure of Gretta. She seemed all right. Thoughtfully he went to a washbasin and scrubbed off the dark stain. He decided to say nothing to anyone about it.

It troubled him. Could he be developing into a sleep walker? His tiredness, as if he had done a day's work since he fell asleep, seemed to indicate that possibility. But BLOOD!

He wished now he had saved some of it. He could have had it analyzed to see if it were human blood. He inspected the bed where he had slept. There was not the slightest smear. Evidently, the blood had dried on his hand before he went back to bed.

Gretta woke up and turned over lazily. She yawned widely, mumbled something, and went back to sleep.

Ben looked at her thoughtfully. That wasn't like her. As long as they had slept together, she had invariably awakened fresh and full of life. She acted almost drugged. He decided not to disturb her.

Frowning in perplexity, he went into the dining room and ate the breakfast served him by efficient servants that had somehow become a part of his household without his knowing who they were or where they had been chosen.

HE WAS just finishing when Georges Ley came in, followed by a protesting servant who insisted he should wait until he had been properly announced.

"Good morning, Georges," Ben greeted him, smiling to cover up the feeling of alarm he was experiencing. "Sit down and have a cup of coffee with me."

Georges hesitated. "I could use it, I guess," he said. He sat down at the table. The cup of coffee slid in front of him almost before he was seated. He gulped some of the hot fluid, setting the cup back down with a bang that endangered its fragile existence.

"Ben," he said, "we have our first trouble. I suppose it had to come even-

tually, but I had begun to hope that it never would."

"Well?" Ben prompted tonelessly. His eyes were half shaded, and he sipped at his coffee slowly to help conceal the tenseness of his features.

"Do you remember the Russian WAAC on chick one? The one that we all knew unofficially was in love with the Negro soldier?" Georges asked.

Ben nodded, his throat tightening.

"She was murdered a few hours ago," Georges said bitterly. "The most brutal job I ever heard of. The medicos insist that her throat was cut first and that she was then picked up by the ankles and rapidly swung around in a circle. There is blood on the walls, the ceiling, and all the furniture in her room. Whoever did it had tremendous strength. She's a big girl, weighs around a hundred and eighty. Do you think an Earthman has strength enough to whirl her around like that? I don't, and I'd bet my bottom dollar that any twelve men on a jury would bring in a verdict of murder at the hands of an unknown Venusian."

"So trouble has come at last," Ben said softly. "I don't suppose there is any chance of keeping this secret for a while until we have a chance to figure things out?"

"Not a chance now," Georges answered. "It's all over camp now. Before the day is over every man on Venus, including the natives, will have heard about it."

Ben looked bitterly at his hand. Could he have done it? The tiredness when he had awakened, the streak of blood on his hand; they were strong evidence. Yet, could he possibly have been strong enough to do it?

Any way you looked at it, it was a crazy murder. Not the type of murder a man with his senses about him would do. But a somnambule, one who

did it while asleep, he might do just that sort of thing. He might believe he was operating a spray gun. He might believe the girl was sick and that was the only way to cure her. He might—oh, he might have any kind of motive that seemed normal and sensible to his sleeping mind, the actual deed being translated into something else entirely in the accompanying dream.

"There's one possibility I've thought of," Georges said, breaking into Ben's thoughts. "Suppose a soldier did it. Suppose he went into her room and made advances toward her and she fought him off or declined without the apparent necessity of a fight. That is quite probable. The men have been here almost ten months now and army discipline is still rigidly enforced. Suppose also she threatened to report him. He decided to kill her. To throw suspicion on the natives, he did the first thing that came into his mind that would be likely to point the finger of suspicion away from all of us and, therefore, him. The whole thing strikes me that way, like what a white man without too much brains would think a Venusian might do."

"That's a very good possibility," Ben agreed. "It would be a good idea to make enquiries on that angle; perhaps conduct a thorough search of all quarters at once for the knife and clothing. Stop the laundry and search the dirty clothes. Somehow, though, that doesn't seem to be to be the answer. I have a peculiar feeling that there was a SANE reason behind that murder. Call it a hunch."

"What do you mean by a sane reason?" Georges asked. "Could such a murder be done by a sane man, unless possibly by a native whose motives might be sane to him but not comprehensible to us?"

"I mean that I have a feeling there

is some definite reason for smearing that blood all over the room," Ben said. "It sounds fantastic, I know. I can't imagine what the reason might be."

"I'll keep that in mind anyway, Ben," Georges said, soberly. "I'd better get back and get your other suggestion into operation at once. I imagine the men in charge will take it for granted that it was a native and not look too hard for a white murderer."

He stood up and saluted. Ben stood up and returned the salute.

HE STOOD there after Georges had left, watching the closed door with bleak eyes. Where had that hunch come from? From his subconscious which held a clear memory of every detail of the crime?

Ung watched Ben emerge from the jungle path into the garden, a quiet smile on his lips. There was a cruel twist to the corners of his mouth and a cold, amused glint in his eyes. He watched while Ben made his way through the garden up to the area way where he was standing.

"Good morning," Ben said, cheerfully.

Ung hesitated, then nodded his recognition of the greeting. "Something is troubling you?" Ung suggested.

"No," Ben said. "Nothing at all. I feel fine. Why? Do I look troubled?"

"You don't look—rested," Ung said, his eyes studying Ben keenly.

"I didn't sleep too well," Ben said. "I woke up several times. Maybe I do look a little under the weather, but I feel all right."

Ung shrugged his shoulders imperceptibly and turned toward the stone seats he and Ben occupied during their discussions.

Ben stared thoughtfully at his back as he followed. He had decided not to say anything to Ung. If something

were amiss, and Ung knew all about it, he might give himself away if Ben pretended nothing had happened. Had his question about something troubling Ben been dictated by knowledge that something **HAD** happened? It might be.

Ung sat down in his accustomed place and Ben sat down opposite him, waiting for Ung to begin the conversation.

"You are progressing quite well," Ung said, plunging at once into things he had been teaching Ben. "I think you are beginning to understand what is meant by each mind being a cosmos by itself, logically independent of all others. When you begin to realize that space is nothing more than a form of expression, you can understand that your mind and all it contains may be as vast as the so-called physical universe. You have no way of knowing deductively that the so-called universe is **NOT** entirely contained in your own mind. You don't exhaust your mind in consciousness, nor do you exhaust the supposed universe while in a state of consciousness."

"Yes," Ben agreed. "I am beginning to see quite clearly what you mean now. In fact, maybe I can go a little ahead of what you have told me already. I see the analogy between the individual mind as a cosmos, and the physical cosmos. If we consider the supposed physical cosmos as being the Supreme Being, then, assuming that it is perfect, our goal is to try to attain the same kind of mentality, so to speak, as the Creator is as a Reality. It's personifying nature, in a way, but in a way that seems to be quite logical and with good grounds for validity. If we consider a man as being a mentality rather than a mind in a body of a certain shape, then that mentality can really be said to be made 'in the image of God'."

"YOU ARE doing very well," Ung said gravely. "Now, there are two paths open to the developing intellect. It can distinguish between Mind and Matter. It can build up theories concerning matter that are physical law, and theories about mind that are psychological law. This is the way of Earth development. It is predicted on the assumption that the mind is a functioning of a material structure which is a part of a postulated physical Cosmos. It is based, fundamentally, on the assumption you make that I exist during the intervals when you are not holding me in consciousness.

"The other way," he went on, "is to admit what you knew to be true when you were a child; namely, that there is no reality for you except the content of your consciousness and your mind. Then, with fewer assumptions you can start out with ONE and only one type of science, psychology. The laws of behavior of your mind alone. The inflexibility of so-called external reality then becomes inflexibility of psychological behavior of the mind. Manipulation of material surroundings then becomes conscious direction of mental processes in the same category as thought."

"I don't think I get what you mean, Ung," Ben said. "It sounds to me like you are trying to say that a physical object can be affected directly by thought."

"Precisely, if you learn how," Ung agreed. "Let me give you an analogy. A man with some incurable habit. He tries to eliminate it, but all his efforts are of no avail. He is a slave to it. It is beyond his ability to break away from the habit that holds him in bondage. That very analogy is the clue to gaining mastery over so-called external reality. The method of curing the man with the incurable habit is to set up

a different habit pattern that attacks the other habit indirectly. The usual method with an appetite habit is to introduce a psychological factor which eventually makes him violently ill each time he partakes of the particular substance of the habit."

"I think they do that with some habits back on the Earth," Ben agreed. "I remember reading ads that claim that slipping their product into a cup of coffee will make tobacco cause a person to be ill, and so that person is forced to give up tobacco."

"That is essentially the right method," Ung said. "And that's what I've been doing with you: introducing counter habits that will, when they ripen, make it possible for you to manipulate nature mentally!"

"I can't see how," Ben said, doubtfully.

"Of course not!" Ung said, irritably. "You can't see how until the time comes that you can do it."

"I guess you're right," Ben placated him.

"Now we'll get on with today's exercises," Ung said. "You now have the drum beat so integrated into your consciousness that it forms the foundations of thought for you. Now you must learn to mold it into form and substance, make it solid, so to speak."

"I think I know what you mean," Ben said, remembering how the drum sound affected him in that room of the flame.

"Very well," Ung went on. "I'll place you under hypnosis and guide your thoughts. Eventually you will be able to do it without hypnosis."

Ben struggled for a moment. He felt a vague alarm. Then his mind became passive. He had been hypnotized so many times now by Ung that he couldn't resist.

The beat of the drums pounded on

the shores of consciousness, their echoes bouncing back into the frothing sea of sound. Protestingly but helplessly, the mind that knew itself as Ben Arnold sank down and down, suspended in a directionless space where it knew not even that it knew itself . . .

MARY ADAMS, white, and Luella Browne, colored, were roommates. They were both originally from Chicago, U. S. A., and occupied a second floor room of the unwaac dorm in Chicago, Venus.

Mary hadn't been able to go to sleep. She kept imagining that she heard a strange rustling sound that seemed to come from deep in the ground.

"Go to sleep, Mary," Luella said, exasperatedly. "Or at least be quiet so I can get some sleep."

"But I tell you," Mary said, "I hear it. It's a strange rustling, like a million insects crawling on leaves."

"I hear it too, Mary," Luella said. "But that's no reason why we shouldn't get some sleep."

"It scares me," Mary said. "I wish I knew what it was."

She got out of bed and turned on the light. Wrapping her bathrobe tightly about her, she went into the bathroom. There were windows in all the rooms, but light was not intense enough to dispense with electric lights even when the eternal cloud layer thinned to a minimum.

She took the drinking glass off the shelf beside the wash basin and reached to turn on the faucet. Her hand paused in midair. Her horrified eyes stared in fascination at the drain.

The drain was literally filled with a seething mass of white. This mass would surge upward and spill over. The spill would separate into small, worm-like things. The instant they separated from the parent mass, they began to

sprout legs. At least that is what it looked like, although it might have been just pseudopod tentacles shooting out from the central body. It might even have been fully developed legs which could be retracted entirely into the body, which were now being pushed out again.

They were forming a moving carpet of evil white over the shiny brilliancy of the glazed bowl, and beginning to crawl over its edge. While they moved, they seemed to grow heads with large jaws.

By the time they dropped off the edge of the wash basin onto the floor, they were a whitish, termite shaped insect. They were no longer the small worms they were when they spilled out of the mass pushing up through the drain of the basin.

Mary screamed. Then she began chewing at the back of her hand frenziedly, backing slowly out of the bathroom.

Luella jumped out of bed and into the bathroom.

"We've got to get out of here," she said, slipping her feet into her bedroom slippers and picking up her bathrobe.

The two girls opened the door to the hall and ran rapidly. They didn't know where they were going, except that it was someplace a long way from their bathroom.

As they half ran, half fell down the stairway to the ground floor, they heard a soul-shattering scream from above. On the main floor there were thousands of the little white termite things.

The two girls ran swiftly toward the front entrance, touching their feet quickly to the seething floor and raising them instantly.

Near the front entrance Luella slipped and fell. At once, she was covered by a white blanket that spotted

ber dark skin. She screamed wildly, her arms thrashing.

Mary paused at the front door and turned. She saw Luella rise, her eyes crusted with the white things so that the lids could not close. She felt sharp, needle-like pains, as some of the things bit at the skin of her ankles. She pushed open the door and ran, the screams of her roommate dinning in her ears as she left the building.

Outside she saw a huge indigo giant. Her eyes registered the fact that he seemed to be standing on a bed of the white things without their crawling on him, and that he held a huge bronze disk at his side. She was so used to seeing the natives now, and they were always so polite and obedient, that these things registered on her sight but did not penetrate to her mind. She ran up to him, crying "Save me" in pidgin English.

He grinned at her broadly. There was a movement at the borders of her vision. She paused, looked into the soulless eyes and the grinning face of the native as the realization penetrated her consciousness that her throat had been skillfully cut and her blood was welling out, pouring down over her breasts.

She took another step toward him before she fell. The last thing she felt was the pain of a million needles pricking her body, and the rough, raspy feel of wool on her skin. She died wondering about the wool. She didn't know it was the legs of the insect things as they crawled over her skin . . .

A HALF hour later, three men in a jeep slowed down to look at the cleanly picked skeleton of what had a few short minutes before been Mary Adams. Slowing down was a mistake. A mile further on, the jeep slewed off the concrete, the three men slapping at

the things attacking their skin.

A native jumped on the running board and cut their throats—an unnecessary act, but he seemed to enjoy it even though he knew it did not hasten their end by more than a minute. He dropped back to the ground and walked contemptuously over the carpet of white. Those of the insect things that clung to his feet quickly dropped off without hurting him.

GEORGES LEY sat asleep in an overstuffed chair in his bedroom. His pipe slipped out of his hand and dropped to the floor. The sound of its dropping awoke him.

He reached over and picked it up, absently taking his lighter from his pocket and relighting it. As he sucked on the stem to get it going, his eyes came to rest on the door to the bathroom. A carpet of white was moving into the room through the crack at the bottom of the door.

As it advanced, it spread out exploratively. He snapped the lighter closed and looked quickly about him. The moving horde was all about him.

One of the things crawled onto his shoe. He bent over to get a closer look at it. Several more climbed onto his shoes. One of them reached the top of a shoe and immediately sunk its jaws into his skin through his stocking.

He took another look at the advancing carpet of white and made a quick decision.

Luck was with him. The things hadn't reached his car in the garage yet. As he picked up speed outside and turned the car toward the distant Sierra Corscatehs, his eyes took in the panorama of destruction. He saw hundreds of people fall and he covered instantly by the moving carpet. He saw grinning natives running through it unharmed, pausing only to slit a throat expertly.

One native hopped onto the running board. Georges shot him through the head and drove on.

Another native threw a knife at him. The knife caught him in the shoulder, sinking up to the hilt as it grazed the back of his shoulder socket and went into the back muscle just under the skin.

His lips formed a grim line as he pressed his foot down on the gas pedal as far as it would go and prayed that no one would get in his way. Once, a huge creature ran blindly across the concrete highway just ahead of him, moving white patches spotting its hide. He heard it bleat pitifully until it moved out of his sight and sound.

The tires became slippery. The car skidded dangerously at the slightest turn of the steering wheel. Another car crept up in the rear. Georges could not make out the driver. It might be another Earthman who had been lucky enough to escape. It might also be a native trying to prevent him from getting to the mountain base. He didn't dare slow down to find out.

He rounded a curve in time to see a car ahead turn around completely and tip over. The occupant's face appeared momentarily before it was covered by the blanket of white. He had been a close friend of Georges.

The skid marks on the pavement were flowing into a uniform white as Georges passed over them. The insect blanket looked somewhat like dirty, unreflected snow. If the highway hadn't been raised above the ground on either side it might have been hard to tell where it left off.

ABRUPTLY, the jungle ended. The highway went uphill at once. The white blanket became a grey-green white, blending off to the pale green of the hill grass.

The danger from the insect things was over. George braked his car to a halt and waited for the other car. His gun was ready. If the driver was not white, he intended to shoot first and ask questions later.

He waited ten minutes. The other car didn't appear. Either the driver had met with disaster at the last moment before reaching safety, or it was a native who didn't care to attack out of the jungle.

Finally, Georges started his car again and climbed up the mountain. He looked back before he climbed into the cloud layer. The jungle spread out below as far as the eye could reach. Except along the borders, there was no sign of the white scourge. But along the edge of the jungle it spilled out, from a distance seeming to be melting snows that have lain all winter and become dirty and dull.

Near at hand was a large herd of animals. They were the sheep-like animals that existed in the clearings of the jungles. They had evidently fled to the hills to escape the insect things. There were other compact herds of them on the hillside as far as he could see.

His mind numbed by the realization of the awful catastrophe that had wiped out the Earth colony in the jungles without warning, Georges started the car again and slowly climbed into the cloud layer.

Unless the same scourge had swept over the plateau above, there were no more than a hundred thousand left of the million and a half humans that had crossed the void from the Earth less than a year before!

What if even these were gone? Was he the only white human left alive on all the planet?

He stepped on the throttle. An hour later he reached the half-way mark

service depot. He almost cried with relief when he saw an Earthman come out to meet him.

And the man was surprised when Georges forgot rank and jumped out of the car to greet him like a long lost brother.

GEORGES LEY sat at a desk reading a typewritten report. It was three days of Earth time since he had escaped the insect horde in that wild ride through the jungle to the safety of the hill country.

Here was the report of the biology branch, and it read: The insect is somewhat analogous to the termite, but with startling differences. The soil of Venus in the jungles consists of a top layer of loosely packed dead vegetation in which thrive many varieties of small plants of the fungoid variety, growing entirely underground.

Over twenty distinct species of these underground plants have been discovered and classified. Most of them are shaped like a puff ball, but a few are snakelike, being sometimes over fifty feet in length.

Infesting this vegetable layer of ground, and existing in concentrations of a thousand to the cubic foot in most places, is a small, wormlike insect which lives off the fungoid varieties, leaving the roots of surface plants strictly alone.

It has been established beyond question that the insects that did the damage are these worms. For some unknown reason, they suddenly emerged from the ground and underwent a metamorphosis analogous to the wing growing ability of some Earth insects; in this case the change being the growth of legs and mandibles, and the change in eating habits from vegetable to animal food.

Above ground they attacked only

animals, leaving all plants alone. Approximately seventy-two hours, Earth time, after they grew their legs, etc., they shed them and again returned to their former state as worms living on the underground fungoid plants.

It is suspected that this three day period has something to do with their reproductive cycle. There is no strong evidence to support this at present, however, and further study of this species will have to be made before any conclusions can be made.

There was much more to the report of a technical nature. Georges skimmed this swiftly. The facts were now clear. On Earth there was the seven year locust, the salmon flies, and many other varieties of insects that appeared and vanished mysteriously, living their own peculiar life cycles.

The cataclysm that had wiped out nearly all of the Earth forces on Venus had been such a thing—unforeseen. Methods would have to be found to exterminate this species if the Earth hoped to develop Venus. Either that or some method would have to be devised to determine just when the three day period came so that the colonists of the future could escape to the hills until the danger was over.

A few truths were becoming all too evident now. The Venusians obviously knew of the menace and knew how to make themselves immune to it. They had not warned the colonizers. They had received the Earth expedition with open arms and helped get them all down in the jungle for only one reason—they had counted on the insect wave wiping them out completely.

They had hoped the base on the plateau would be abandoned so that every man on Venus would be wiped out. It might have been abandoned, except for the fact that it had to be maintained

because the chick ships could not be moved down. They didn't have power enough to take off unaided and they were too large to move down the hill. Except for the accident to chick one, and its landing on the plateau, the base would almost certainly have been on the lowlands.

What would happen now? It made Georges ill to think of the future.

HIS MIND switched to Ben Arnold. Was Ben still alive? Or had the natives let him be eaten up by the insects too? King Ben! It was a sour jest now. It would probably be better if Ben were dead. If he were alive, there would be too many complications.

The treaty. Why had the natives been so insistent that it be included in the treaty that Ben was to be forever beyond the law? It had been done, whatever the motive that lay behind it. The United Nations had passed a special law with a clause of irrevocability, so that regardless of what might come in the future, Ben as an individual was beyond all law of both Venus and Earth. Even in a war with Venus, there was no revoking that law. In the first flush of enthusiasm over the wonderful way things were developing on Venus, everything had been done to ensure the continuance of friendly relations. Passage of the law had been effected easily, as being just something to satisfy a whim of the natives.

It had been thought it was probably necessary to give their king "face." The Earth governments had been more than eager to give the king of Venus all the "face" and importance the Venusians could desire.

But now, the treaty had been a farce from the beginning so far as the Venusians were concerned. Each and

every native had run his truck or done some other job, bowing and kowtowing to the Earth invaders, a wide grin on his face, knowing that in the near future that time would come when there was nothing left of the invaders except bleached bones and empty houses.

Each native had been friendly and courteous and helpful, nursing in his heart the secret "triumph," the knowledge that he was being friendly to a corpse.

Thinking is based largely on tradition and custom. More so than a person would believe without going into it. Undoubtedly, the diabolical plan of the Venusians arose from their past tradition. That tradition was completely unknown to the unarmy expedition. Perhaps someday, the precedent for all this would be discovered. Maybe sometime in the dim past, some other race from another planet had landed and been destroyed by those insects.

Georges' thoughts kept returning to Ben Arnold. Was he alive or dead? What was the secret of the immunity of the natives to the insects? Was it natural or produced by some chemical? If it were chemical, they could immunize Ben and he would probably be alive. If it were natural, the dislike of the insects for the smell or taste of the native skin, then in all probability Ben was dead.

What would happen now? The way the natives ran around cutting throats, they would undoubtedly fight any force sent down into the lowlands now. A task force was already being formed to go down in force. The tanks that had been brought for just that purpose were being gone over and fueled.

The post set up at the edge of the jungle still had reported no contact with the natives. The insects had all gone back into the ground, though. If the natives were going to attack—but of

course they wouldn't. They would be thinking up something else, waiting for the inevitable task force that would be sent down to explore the damage and perhaps attempt revenge.

Georges' phone rang, breaking into his thoughts. He picked up the receiver listlessly. It was the observation detail at the edge of the jungle.

"Captain Ley?" the voice at the other end of the wire asked excitedly. Then, without waiting for confirmation, "Lt. Arnold, I mean King Arnold, is here with several natives. He refuses to say a word, but one of the natives says they want to come up to the plateau for a talk."

"Put King Arnold on the phone," Georges ordered.

There was a pause. The voice of the soldier came again. "He still refuses to talk, sir," he said. "He acts a little queer, like he was drugged or something."

"O.K., load them into a truck and bring them up," Georges ordered.

He dropped the phone back on its cradle and stood up. "So Ben is alive!" he muttered. Giving orders to his secretary to call a meeting of the general staff, he left the room.

THE THIRTEEN members of the general staff sat on one side of the long table, six on either side of Captain Ley. On the other side of the table stood ten eight-foot natives, all of them old and with wrinkled skins. They were different than any natives Georges had seen before in that they wore a homespun wool cloak that draped from their shoulders to the floor.

One of the natives stood two paces in front of the rest. Immediately behind him and closely guarded by two of the natives stood Ben, his face devoid of expression, his eyes blank looking.

The native in the front did the talking. "It grieves us that your people were destroyed by the ants," he said, speaking in Venusian. "I am Ung, a lowly priest. I have been for some time the teacher of this," he glanced at Ben with an expression of bitterness and hate, "this man whom we have taken for our king. He has known for some time of the menace. It was our understanding that he had given you warning."

"What!" Georges was so amazed that he stood up. "Is this true, Ben?"

"True," Ben said. His lips moved slowly, but the sneer on his face was unmistakable.

"When the insects came," Ung went on, "we were amazed to find that none of your people had left. To save them was impossible. We did the next best thing wherever we could. We ended their suffering mercifully."

"You mean cutting throats," Georges said grimly.

"Yes," Ung bowed sadly. "It was all we could do. It saved only minutes of intense torture, to be sure, but it was merciful. After it was all over we began to wonder why you had not gone to the hills until the danger was past. We asked our—king," again he turned and gave Ben a look of intense hatred. "He told us that he hated his own race and planned to destroy them so that they would leave us alone. Our people were deeply shocked, you may be sure. In the past time that you have been here, we have come to love you as brothers. We wish you to know that we do not condone the mad scheme of this man whom we made our king."

"Is what the priest says true?" Georges asked Ben.

BEN SHRUGGED off the restraining hands of the two men on either side of him and stepped forward, the sneer

on his face changing to a look of intense hatred and contempt.

"It's true," he said. "You aren't here to make friends with these people. You will do just as the English did in every country they overran; just as the settlers did to the Indians."

He flung his arms out in a dramatic gesture, tossing his head wildly. "I won't see that happen! I'll order my subjects to kill the rest of you by torture. Now get off this planet and stay off."

The two natives had stepped forward and now took Ben's arms and dragged him back.

"You see?" Ung said sadly. "He is utterly mad. We are a friendly people. We wish to do what we can to wipe out the terrible wrong that has been done you. We will work for you, help you rebuild."

The man sitting next to Georges handed him a note that had passed down the line. It read, "Ben is undoubtedly under the influence of some drug, or else under hypnosis. Order him held for observation and stall until we can be sure."

"It is our present ruling," Georges said, "that your king be turned over to us temporarily for observation so that we can decide for ourselves if he is without reason and mad. We will then talk with you further. Meanwhile, we would be very grateful if you would remain here as our guests. It should take no longer than a few hours to decide."

"Before we grant that," Ung said hastily, "we wish to emphasize that we have not violated our treaty except for the mercy slayings. We regret that our king cannot be held responsible under our law for his terrible crime. We regret that you cannot punish him either, that the treaty and your own law forbid that. We have already passed

judgment on him so far as we are able. He remains our king for the rest of his life, but we have stripped him of his power. He is now king in name only. He can go where he will and no one can touch him. It is our decision that he be ostracized forever, a man without friend or country or race. It is our decision that you accept this ruling of the priests and impose the same ruling. If you do not, we will renounce our treaty and fight. If you do, we will continue to assist you. I am sure you will not be trapped by the ants when they come again."

He smiled and stepped back, his gaunt indigo frame showing grotesquely as his cloak opened and closed with his steps. In his eyes was a gleam that might have been triumph.

"NO EVIDENCE of hypnosis or drugs, sir," the psychiatrist said to Captain Ley. "He sticks to his story. He hates us and, according to his own admission, planned to get rid of us. According to him, the natives had nothing to do with it. He ordered them to keep quiet, saying he would warn us of the ants himself."

"But that's impossible!" Georges exclaimed. "Are you sure it isn't hypnosis?"

"All our tests say no," the psychiatrist said. "Of course, the native priests may know a few tricks about hypnosis that we haven't learned. We've put him under hypnosis and he sticks to his story. We've tried truth drugs on him and he still sticks to it. If what he says is posthypnotic suggestion, I'd like to learn their method. We have no way of creating a permanent block in the mind that will defy counterhypnosis and truth serums."

"Have you found out anything at all?" Georges asked.

"Nothing other than a strange phobia

he had that his mind contains a substance made from drum beats out of which he can create another cosmos and destroy the real one at will. My frank opinion is that he is insane. If he is, it is quite possible that he really did plan all this in an effort to kill us all."

* * *

THE OLD man felt a tug at his sleeve which jerked him back to the present. He opened his eyes. The ancient ventilation fan rattled. The motley sound of human voices hung in the air about him, and from a great distance the beat of the drums came, muted and patient in their tempo.

The faces of the young cadets about the table were tense and white. The old man picked up his glass of beer and finished it in one gulp. It had become warm and stale.

"Of course, there was a trial," he said, wiping his mustache with a frayed coat sleeve. "The biggest trial there ever was or ever will be. The high priests of Venus were there. The least man on the jury was the president of some South American country. That was because the priests insisted that no one less than a ruler could sit in trial on a ruler, even though the ruler on trial couldn't be touched by law.

"The United Nations Court hired the best brains in the world to arrive at a decision equal to one Solomon might have made if he were alive. I think the wording of the court's decision was that since Ben Arnold could not be tried, it was the peoples of Earth and Venus who were on trial, and those peoples were sentenced to refrain from speaking to or associating with Ben Arnold for the rest of his life. Stiff penalties were set up for anyone who was convicted of doing so.

"It was something like that, anyway. I heard about it and read about it in the newspapers, piecing it all together

until I got the whole story. It took some time. You see, I didn't hear of the trial until over a year after it took place, so I had to hunt up the newspaper stories in old library files."

"Bu-bu-but . . ." one of the cadets tried to interrupt.

"The trial was of course nothing but a farce, a show put on because the priests of Venus had made it plain that only on completion of the trial would they consent to peaceful exploitation of Venus once more. Georges Ley could have taken the stand and exploded the whole frameup, or setup, whichever you want to call it. Even I could have made fools out of the priests and put the blame where it belonged if I had been able to attend the trial."

"But wait . . ." the cadet tried to interrupt again.

THEY VOTED Ben Arnold a pension sufficient to keep him alive, and passed a law that he was not to be allowed to stay in one place more than a week. Only they worded it so that it would be impossible for him to stay in one spot longer than a week by imposing stiff penalties on any landlord or property owner who permitted him to live on his premises longer than that. Then they set him free. He was free to go where he wished—the Earth, Venus, and Mars when it was developed enough so that civilian space lines were running."

"But I thought . . ." the cadet said loudly.

"The newspapers had a gold mine in it. Ben Arnold, a greater traitor than his namesake, Benedict Arnold. Ben Arnold, the arch traitor of all time."

"But I thought you were Ben Arnold, from your story," the young cadet finally managed to say.

"I am," the old man said.

"But you said you weren't at the

trial," the cadet said quickly, "and history tells us that you were!"

"The newsreels of that time show that you were there!" a second cadet said triumphantly. "You were there, if you are Ben Arnold."

"We're talking of two different things," the old man said patiently. "I was there and I wasn't there."

"Look, old man," the cadet who had bought the beer said, half rising. "We only have a couple of seconds left. The last warning has sounded for us to get aboard our ship. Can you tell us in a few short words what you mean? Please!"

"I was not there," the old man reiterated. "The last I remember before the catastrophe was sitting on the bench listening to Ung, back in his garden. The next I remember was standing before the flame, the four Gods of Venus looking at me from their ten feet of height. I had a fleeting impression that

I had been staring at that flame that hovered above the pedestal for an eternity, from the eyes of one of those idols, but I can't be sure. Either I'm mad, and the psychiatrists were right, or my soul was plucked from my body and planted, imprisoned, in the figure of the God of heat and light of Venus, while he took possession of my body to accomplish his revenge. I . . ."

A shrill whistle issued its final warning. The young cadets shoved back their chairs and dashed for the gates. The ventilation fan whined shrilly for a moment, and then resumed its rattling. The blanket of voice noises and other sounds of the space depot hung motionless in the air.

The beating of the drums came closer and settled around the old man possessively, and a blast of ozone-impregnated air souged through the waiting room as the ship carrying the young cadets rose from the field outside.

THE END

LOOK—NO TUBES!

THE world of electronics is an ever-changing one, full of unexpected surprises. Today with research going full blast it is impossible to predict what the next day's new gadgetry will be or what it will do.

While it is conceded without question that the vacuum tube is man's greatest invention, a whole new array of inventions seem to be coming forth, inventions that have the peculiar property of doing away with vacuum tubes. Now it is possible to have radio transmitters and receivers which do not employ a single vacuum tube!

We are familiar at least with the magnetic amplifier which has been discussed in these pages before. It is essentially a vacuum-tubeless amplifier that does the same thing as a conventional amplifier except that it exploits the properties of transformers.

The transistor, a gadget which too has the ability to amplify electric currents, has come to the fore. This ingenious little device is nothing more than a crystal of the element Germanium, plated on one side with gold, and contacted by two delicate wires. Between the plate and one wire a cur-

rent is fed. From between the plate and the other wire another current appears—greatly magnified—but a mirror image of the input current. Since in effect this is what any amplifier does, the transistor is too an amplifier.

The mechanism of the transistor is little understood. It has a great deal to do with the properties of surface films, a subject which has only recently begun to get its due share of study. It is still only slightly investigated but it promises to offer some wonderful devices to the science of electronics.

The value of the transistor lies in its size, ruggedness and simplicity, all of which a vacuum tube, even the best, lacks. Electron tubes are complex gadgets subject to a great deal of trouble. Not so the transistor. It is simple and cheap and it promises to replace the vacuum tube completely wherever low power requirements are found. It is believed that perhaps it may be extended to high power circuits, but not for some time yet. Hearing aids, small receivers, portable equipment, etc., will all make use of the transistor.

Carter T. Wainwright

GAS-BUGGY VERSUS ELECTROMOBILE

WE CONSIDER the automobile powered by the internal combustion engine as so much a natural thing that we forget that there is a much finer method of propulsion. Several times previously in this magazine, the electric powered automobile has been discussed. In a recent issue mention was made of the fact that all the automotive world is waiting for is a suitable storage device for fairly large quantities of electricity. With this gadget—when it is invented—and some day it will be—all that will be necessary is to attach electric motors to the wheels of the car—and presto!—you're off! But while we wait for this magical invention, there is still another way to drive a car by electricity.

But first consider the advantages. Why should a car be driven by electricity when the internal combustion engine performs so satisfactorily? The answer is simple. In an electrically driven automobile, all the complex gears, transmissions, and all the paraphernalia associated with complex gas engines, is done away with. All that is needed is a source of electricity, a couple of motors, and brakes. That's all!

It's easy to see what that would mean. A lot of minds have been thinking about it. The perfect set-up would be the electric storage device mentioned above, but since we don't have that gadget, it's necessary to look elsewhere for the solution of our problem. And it lies closer at hand than we ordinarily think. Specifically, an answer is provided if one looks at the gas-electric and the Diesel-electric train.

The proposed automobile, one of which has already been built by an enterprising manufacturer, uses a very similar power plant. The automobile has a conventional gasoline engine mounted in the rear of the car. This engine is connected to a direct current electric dynamo—the source of the electric power which takes the place of the hypothetical storage gadget or accumulator. The electric power from the dynamo is fed to four electric motors, one to each wheel. The result is a smooth running car which lacks any transmission, differential or any other complex gear train. No clutches, no complicated mechanism to get all fouled up. Just a simple engine-driven generator feeding to electric motors!

Now since the generator is driven by a gasoline engine, aside from the advantage of not having gear trains and clutches, what is the great advantage? Well, the whole difficulty associated with the internal combustion engine as used in cars, is the fact that it must operate at so many different speeds, ranging from about four hundred revolutions per minute to several thousands. Unfortunately no gas engine can operate efficiently at all these speeds. There is one optimum speed that an internal combustion engine can be driven at. In a conventional car we accept the inefficiency

and make the most of it. But in the gas electric job, we run the engine at a constant speed! The speed selected is the optimum for that particular engine. The result is unparalleled effectiveness and economy which can't be achieved in a gas engine whose speed continually varies.

Of course such a gas electric machine is not as efficient nor as simple as the hypothetical all-electric we are so fond of discussing. But it is a vast improvement over the conventional machine. While it undoubtedly will be some time before we see such machines in use, we know they can be made. Perhaps their greatest importance will stem from use in long distance heavy duty trucks where gear trains are a necessity and an anathema. As many as fourteen different speeds forward are used in these bulky monsters. Gas-electric power would go far to eliminate such complexities.

STILL another approach to automobile design is found in the development of the gas turbine. At the British Industries Fair of this year, there was exhibited a gas turbine of a size suitable for automobiles. It must be understood that when we say gas turbine, we are not referring to jet engines or the like. The gas turbine is an internal combustion engine using air and fuel to burn, expand, and drive against bucket turbine blades which turn a rotor and produce directly, rotary motion. Because a gas turbine like any turbine, is an extremely efficient machine, utilizing all the latent energies of the fuel, it is highly adaptable to an automobile. But there are still some problems. Gas turbines run at high speeds, consequently they must be geared down to operate transmissions and thence wheels of automobiles. Because the speed ratios are almost a hundred to one and the blades revolve at tremendous speeds this is a rather difficult job. But it can be done.

The turbine car-drive is not as good as the electric designs discussed previously, but it is indicative of the fact that the conventional reciprocating engine is on the way out.

Another phase of automobile design is not concerned with power plants. Instead we are thinking of the shape and structure of the machine. As most cars are built today, they are flashy tear-dropped monstrosities with no functional value whatsoever. They are streamlined to the point of ridiculousness. An automobile travels for the most part at speeds which are a far cry from the velocities for which stream-lining and air-foiling are requisites. But to satisfy public taste these things are done.

It is not difficult to visualize what the car of the future will look like, especially the storage-device, electric motor job. It will be perfect for the task for which it is designed. And it will not be a chromium plated ornamented mechanical beast which looks idiotic. It will be a car!

THE VENOMOUS GIRDLE

By
**LESTER
BARCLAY**

Like Samson, Makin fell victim to the treachery of a woman, and was shorn of his strength. But when he regained his manhood, his mighty deeds rang across an entire planet and brought Utopia to Earth

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"**W**E'VE WON, Gil! We've beaten them!" Sarko chorled.

Gil Makin's chest heaved in a deep sigh of satisfaction. What Sarko said was true. The Earthmen had won, but only after a Titanic struggle, a struggle which had taken countless lives. The whole Solar system was now theirs. And Gil Makin was master of a Universe.

A trumpet sounded from a long distance off, was joined by the rising crescendo of other trumpets, until the sound

was like that of a gigantic blast of triumph. As he stepped out of the tent, Makin motioned for Sarko to follow. The long ranks of grey-dressed men stiffened in attention at sight of their chief. There was no need for the junior officers to call their squads to stand at attention. As if by magic, the ranks of men, which seemed to stretch for countless miles, straightened into an erect line. A group of generals standing apart from their lower-ranking officers, stepped forward. They stopped in a body before Makin, and made a

She looked at me, and welcomed me from where she reclined on her luxurious throne, which consisted mostly of cushions



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formal salute. Makin returned the salute and smiled.

"At ease, gentlemen," Makin said. "Have the men dismissed. You Sarko, and Gordon, Damen, Hiu-San, and Bekoff, join me in a walk, please."

The six men, Makin in the lead, walked slowly over the green toward the shelter of an immense elm. There were several orderlies busy in the preparation of food, and at sight of the party coming toward them, hastened to get things ready. Makin waved his hand in a gesture for the others to be seated, and even though it was only a signal for them to fall to the food, there was something in his manner that seemed to give largesse to the movement.

That was Gil Makin, though. He was big in everything, from his size which was a generous three inches over six feet, to his hands which looked like they were large enough to go about the throat of an ox. Makin could not be small about anything. It was the deciding factor in all of his doings. His men would go through a fiery furnace at his slightest wish. They had been known to die for him, even though they could have saved their lives by simply refusing a command.

They began to eat at his signal, and as the good food was washed down by great draughts of heady wine, their tongues were loosened and talk became general. Makin's eyes glowed in good-feeling as he watched and listened. For these five men had been very close to him for many years; many had been their vicissitudes, and many had been the dangers they had faced before victory had been a *fait accompli*.

Their talk was boastful, as is all warrior talk. One by one, the great battles were brought to light and recounted, each man trying to outdo his

neighbor in relating how much he had done to win the battle. Only Sarko was silent, his lean whippet-face immobile, and his green eyes cold in the study of his neighbor. For Sarko was the watchdog of his master, Makin, and death rode the length of an assassin's sword, even here. Many times in history's pages a conqueror had met death at the hands of his so-called friends, and Gil Makin would not be added to that list if Sarko could help it.

It was Bekoff who mentioned the woman.

"... I tell you, she was beautiful as the dawn of victory," he described.

Makin, lost in thought for a moment, said, "Who? I'm sorry, Bekoff. I was thinking of something."

"Who? Hah! The most wonderful creature ever made for man. The woman of the hills."

Makin's brows knit in bewilderment. Bekoff smiled and continued: "It was in the campaign against the Mongols. Remember, Makin? Will I ever forget? When you sent orders to retreat and I cursed you for being a scared fool because the battle against the Mongol, Hu-Sun, was not yet won... How was I to know that Hiu San was in the hills waiting for the Mongol horde to come through?"

Hiu-San laughed shrilly, his slant-eyes almost closed in his wide, flat face. His head was thrown back in glee. He slapped his thigh with a gauntleted hand and said:

"Aie! I remember well. The sun shooting from the mirrors in flaming signals across the green hills, our men fleeing down the narrow throat of the funnel and Hu-Sun's men after them, and then the pincers suddenly closing on the dirty Mongol tribes. Aie! I will never forget."

"But I did not know what our

mighty chief had planned," Bekoff whined. "He did not take me into his confidence."

ONLY Sarko heard the muted tone of anger in the man's voice, but he did not betray by the smallest sign that he had. His eyes only blinked twice, his face remained completely impassive.

" . . . So our men fled, their arms dropping by the wayside in their panic. And the Mongol pursued until they reached the narrowest part of the funnel. Then the trap was sprung. Of course, I knew what had happened then.

"But I have lost the thread of my tale. It was later that day. We were pursuing Hu-Sun himself. I had a full company of my crack cavalry with me, and we caught sight of the Mongol and his personal guard and set out in chase. Up and down and across the green hills. Our horses were the fresher, and soon we came within arrow distance. One by one his men fell but always, as if by some protective fate, he escaped the shafts. But the chase was not for too long. His mount had his nose set in a path, and though it was not to be seen we followed in his wake.

"Suddenly, with the suddenness of the moon leaping from a cloud, we were in a sort of glade. A campfire blazed cheerily in a hollow, and by its light we saw a tent not far away. The Mongol's mount was tethered to one of the poles. I set some of the men on guard, though there wasn't a soul to be seen, and I and several others moved cautiously into the area of light.

"We stepped forward until we were almost on the lip of the threshold. Just inside the flap stood a guard, the most gigantic man I'd ever seen. Makin, I

swear he would have dwarfed even you. This guard looked me straight in the eyes and showed not the slightest sign of fear. Instead he said, 'Welcome, stranger, to the presence of the woman, Celeste.'

"It was then I saw the woman in the background. She was seated on a sort of throne, which seemed to consist mostly of cushions. Prostrated before her was the Mongol, Hu-Sun. She was looking at me and her lips were parted in a strange welcoming smile. Her hair was ebony, brushed into shining waves, her eyes midnight blue, her lips so red and full my own puckered as though I was tasting their sweetness. I looked away from that wondrously beautiful face and saw the rest of her. I tell you, a man could not call himself that who did not feel as I did when I saw that ravishing body barely covered by the slight garments she affected.

"I stepped forward, and she looked down at the Mongol at her feet. The smile on her lips twisted to one of scorn as she said, 'You came for this. Take it away!' My men dragged the Mongol away. His eyes were closed. As he passed me, I heard him say, 'Forgive me, oh mighty Celeste, for I have failed thee.'"

There was no question that Bekoff was a spellbinder in his telling of the story. The others, with the exception of Sarko, hung on every word.

"I started to walk toward her and she lifted a hand and said, 'It is not you I want, it is Makin.' I laughed and answered, 'He will have to wait his turn.' Then . . ."

"Then . . . ?" Makin demanded.

" . . . Nothing. Bekoff does not relate his amours as does some goat-herd."

The others broke into laughter, and the nearest slapped the story teller on

the shoulders. Only Sarko and Makin were quiet. But it was evident the story had made a strange impression on the mighty chief. For he no longer sipped of the wine or ate of the food. His eyes sent a signal to Sarko which the other understood.

"Gentlemen, excuse me," Makin said, suddenly arising. "No! Go ahead. I have sent for dancing women, the wine gurgles full well in the barrel and you are wearied of war. Play, my friends, until I call on you again. Come Sarko. There are things I must need of you."

"TELL me, Sarko," Makin said on their return to his tent, "What did you think of Bekoff's story?"

Sarko grinned, a sour writhing of his lips.

"Give me the man," he said, "and I will give you his words. Our friend Bekoff has changed in the past few months. It seems to me he has changed since the day we beat the Mongol."

"I too have noticed the change," Makin said. "But there might be good reason for it. It is not my concern. What is, is this story. Sarko, do you recall the last batch of Mongol prisoners we took? We sweated them pretty thoroughly. There was one who told a strange tale of a woman from whom the Mongols took orders. We dismissed it because the man died from his wounds, and we thought it the ravings of a delirious mind. Now I wonder . . ."

"This is not the time for small wonders," Sarko pointed out. "We have waited, we, the descendants of the last tribe who once inhabited this planet, for many hundreds of years to come again into our own. That time has come at last. We are the rulers now not alone of the Earth but of the whole universe. And you worry about a wom-

an in some primitive hut in the hills. There is great work to be done . . ."

"Work for which I have made you ready, Sarko," Makin said. "I am a warrior, not an administrator. The business of ruling in peace would mean a slow death to me."

"Gil Makin," Sarko suddenly arose from the heap of cushions on which he had been reclining, and strode forward until he confronted his leader who was sitting on another heap of cushions, "do not play the fool! Men like Bekoff are but waiting the day when you let loose the reins which are rightly held only by your hands. Man does not change. And we have been forced to use as confederates the scum of a Universe. Now they are in a position to do harm. And you want to step out of the picture just when you are needed most."

Makin pondered deeply the other's words. Sarko had right on his side, moral right. For surely, as Sarko had pointed out, Makin was the only proper man to rule. Yet, that story of the woman . . . Hang the woman, Makin suddenly thought. Women had no place in his life. If he had need of any, there were hundreds of dancing girls who would flock at the chance to be his wife or concubine.

His fingers toyed with the hilt of his dagger, while he stroked his chin with his other hand. The touch of the metal made his conscious of the odd dagger the hilt crowned. He looked down at it, and noted the curious carvings cut into the blade and hilt. Bekoff had given the dagger to him at the close of the last campaign. It had graced the belt of Hu-Sun, the Mongol. Bekoff had taken it from the Mongol and had given it to Makin as a gift. And Makin had become so fond of it that it was the first thing his eyes wanted to see on awakening, and the first

thing his fingers wanted to touch. He smiled faintly at the odd feeling of warmth the precious metal imparted to his fingers. It was like feeling the warm, smooth skin of a woman . . .

The sudden desire which came to him then was like the flash and strike of lightning, and like lightning's touch it was not to be denied.

"I must see this woman!" Makin said, his voice like that of one of his war trumpets. "Take over, Sarko, until my return. I will give you the seal of my power and let the others know where I stand in the matter. I will not be gone long, I promise. But I *must* go . . ."

* * *

"YOU will come to a narrow belt of forest," Bekoff had said, when Makin had asked for directions. "Elms, ancient and hoary with their age. You will see the forest as you come down into the pass from the heights of the split mountain. Ride straight into the path which you will find. It will lead you to the tent of the woman . . ."

The night was mysterious, a crescent moon riding the edge of a cloud. The forest smells came rank and strong to Makin's nostrils. His mount padded along the moss-bordered path like a ghost. Makin had never before been so aware of nature. Then, just as Bekoff had described, the path ended and there was the fire, the tent, its flap parted so that he saw the sentry standing within; but beyond that he could see nothing.

He dismounted and strode forward, his hand caressing the hilt of the wide-bladed sword at his side, and a smile on his lips. His steps were sure and unafraid as he came closer and closer to the tent, and at last into it. The sentry was as huge as Bekoff had described him, a giant of a man who dwarfed even Makin. He stood, one

hand on the shaft of a spear, and clothed in some sort of felt garments with a cap-like affair on his head, of the same material.

"Oh, mighty Celeste, queen of the night, mistress of the day, Goddess of delight, the one for whom you have sent arrives!" the sentry intoned.

Makin's breath quickened and his smile grew wider as he stepped full into the confines of the tent. It was exactly as Bekoff told, the cushions, the look of luxurious magnificence, the . . . NO! It wasn't quite as Bekoff said. He had said she was beautiful. But there were limits to beauty. She stepped beyond those limits. Never had he seen the likes of her. For beside her, all others paled and became garden varieties of loveliness. Her eyes beckoned him. Still smiling, he moved forward the few steps which separated them, and stood erect and proud before her reclining loveliness.

"I called to you," she said. "I knew you would come."

"How did you know I would hear you?" he asked.

"Those whom I desire to hear, do," she said.

"So-o! A useful hobby, telepathy. In my case it proved . . ."

"Bekoff spoke of me," she interrupted.

All his nerve ends tingled suddenly. The nearness of danger always acted like that on him. His hand tightened on the sword hilt.

"Do not be a fool, Makin," she said. "Nonto would make mincemeat of you before you could draw. But I did not bring you here to quarrel. I had a reason. Nonto!"

THE sentry stepped into the circle of light cast by some mysterious source. Makin saw then he was black, with thick lips and sullen eyes.

"Mistress?" Nonto bowed low, his hands in a gesture of obeisance.

"Bring something to drink and food so that we may sup. Our friend has come a long distance. He is a conqueror and is tired of many things." She gestured with her hand for Makin to sit at her side as Nonto stepped past the ten flaps.

Makin's senses stirred as the fragrance of some heady perfume came to his nostrils. The very nearness of this woman was a challenge. Her bosom was carved perfection under the misty cloth she wore. He could see her long bare legs stretched out, their tiny feet hidden under several of the pillows. She leaned sidewise so that her face was but inches from his own.

"Do I stir you, conqueror?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "But all women stir me. Warriors have little time for them. So that even a witch would hold appeal."

Her laughter trilled like a bird's song.

"I like that. You are not soft, as the others were. But I am not like other women, either. Tell me, conqueror, would you share your conquests?"

"Does the eagle share his meal?" Makin asked.

Nonto returned bearing trays of food and several falcons of wine. Celeste ate and drank sparingly, but Makin found both food and drink excellent and he ate with relish. Her beautiful eyes never left his face, and she studied him with an intent which was almost hypnotic. As though Nonto knew the exact instant when they would be done, he returned for the dishes, and left again, leaving them alone.

Celeste resumed where they had been interrupted. "It has been a long time since the white man was the superior race. The last which tried did not stay long."

"This is another time," Makin said. "And a much different one. This time we stay. But why speak of these things? Surely there must be other subjects, more suited to the occasion, on which we can talk? And again, why must we talk at all?"

She smiled with her lips, and though the smile lingered as Makin suddenly moved closer until his body was touching hers, there was a spark of anger in her eyes. His hand reached to caress her, and hers came down and removed his fingers.

"We must talk," she said, "because you are usurping my rights."

Gil Makin sat bolt upright. A frown serried his brow. "*Your* rights? What do you mean?"

"I have ruled over this planet for a long time, and I do not relish losing my rule," Celeste replied. "For I am the last of a long line, and there will be none after me."

His shoulders heaved in a shrug. "The end comes to all, for anything," Makin said. "I do not understand what you mean, but what difference? Come, let us not spend the night in talk. I have travelled a long, wearying way because of what a man told me. . . ." He reached again for her. This time she did not evade him.

HIS lips were already tasting the fragrance of hers, when fingers like steel cables tore him from her. Makin was dressed in travelling armor, light as paper. The dagger and sword hung at his side. He had the strength of a giant. But in the grip of Nonto, he was as a babe. Yet, Makin could not give up without a struggle. Somehow, he managed to twist away from Nonto. The giant let him get away, but only for an instant. Makin reached for his weapons, but he was much too slow.

Nonto did nothing more than slap at

Makin, yet the blow sent the smaller man spinning as though he'd been hit by a sledge. Anger rode a red haze across Makin's brow. Forgetting the steel at his side, he wanted only to hammer the giant into submission. He leaped forward, both hands shooting a tattoo on the brown skin, trying to bring Nonto down. But the man seemed made of iron. He took the blows as if they were a child's.

Nonto was slow, but in his slowness was the march of inexorable fate. He moved with a sort of ponderous dignity. But he never made a backward step, and after a while Makin began to understand the plan of the giant. The heap of pillows at the rear of the tent was where Nonto meant to corner Makin. There, the smaller man would stand no chance at all.

Nonto's face was bleeding from a dozen cuts where Makin's fist had slashed him in cruel biting blows. But there was an odd, savage glee in the dark man's eyes. It was as if he were saying: Wait, I'll get you yet.

And at the end he did!

Makin had pounded a swift one-two punch, once to the midriff and the other to the mouth. He had stepped back in a shift of footwork. But his right foot slid along the silken edge of a pillow, and before he could recover his balance Nonto stepped in, both hands suddenly swift as a swallow's wings in flight. A hammer seemed to explode its force against the side of Makin's head, and he fell into a pool of inky blackness which held in its depths exploding universities.

"**CAREFUL** with him, Nonto," a feminine voice said.

They were the first sounds Makin heard. He opened his eyes and turned his head. He was no longer under a canvas canopy. The sun was shining

and he was in the open. His hands were pressed close to his sides and his feet seemed held in immovable bonds. There were three shadows close to his head, and by a terrific effort Makin was able to turn his head so he could see to whom they belonged.

A bitter grin broke on his lips when he recognized one of the figures as that of Bekoff. "The traitor, Bekoff, has come to collect his due," Makin said aloud.

Bekoff turned at the sound, strode to the recumbent figure and planted a booted foot into Makin's face with passionate fury.

"Enough of that!" Celeste said, sharply.

Bekoff spread his hands wide. "What difference? I owed him that."

"All right, Nonto. Undo his bonds. He's harmless."

At Celeste's words, Makin felt fingers at his hands and legs, and in a moment Nonto's voice said, "He is free."

"Get up, Makin," the woman ordered.

Makin clumsily and painfully stood up and looked down at his oddly clothed body. All he wore was a peculiar sort of girdle wrapped about his waist. It seemed to be constructed entirely of hair. Makin took the three steps forward which separated him from the traitor, the friend whom he had loved and trusted. Then, his right fist shot up in a short arc which, had it ended where it was aimed, would have collided with Bekoff's chin. But before he raised his arm more than a few inches, pain so intense it brought a scream from Makin's lips, shot along his every nerve.

"You are powerless, mighty Makin," Celeste said smugly. "The girdle binds you well."

"What have you done to me?" Makin groaned.

"Like the ancient Samson," Celeste replied, "we have bound you with the strength which you have lost. Feel of your head."

Makin's trembling hands went to his skull. It was as smooth as a ball of ivory.

"I had you bound with the girdle which once bound Samson. Your hair went to join that of his and the others who have fallen into my trap. Your strength is as empty as that of water in a pitcher. And without you, your army will fall apart, your men will succumb to me swiftly. Aye. Bekoff will lead my army to victory, and I will ride again into the ancient city as once I did—a conqueror."

SO THE prophecy had come true, Makin thought. He had not told Sarko of his dream and the doom it foretold—that he would lead his forces back to Earth and conquer all but a woman. This woman was his mortal enemy, and had been for thousands of years. She had never died, just as Makin had never died. Their souls could not die. Makin knew he had possessed the body of the ancient Samson since early youth. The ones he fought had always been the Phillistines.

Celeste made a movement of her head, and Nonto stepped forward and heaved Makin across his wide shoulders.

"Now," said the woman, "we will take him with us and carry him always so that his men can see what we have done to their mighty warlord. They will flee from us as the beasts before the fire."

What she prophecied came true. One by one, Makin's generals fell before the army of Bekoff. And one by one the generals were captured, until only Sarko remained. But try as they might, they could not take him prisoner though

his forces melted like the snow before the spring sun.

Months passed. The girdle had become a second skin to Makin. He could not stand the touch of anything against it. It was torture to even wash himself, so that after a while his personal odor was foul smelling. He had been placed in a cage, and was now and then thrown a mess of food, just enough to keep his body together. At the end, he was but skin held together only by the accident of his bone structure.

So they came, after the last victory, to the ancient city. Civilizations had come and gone on Earth. Nothing remained. Celeste had a million men dig to the site of the ancient city. They found the core of it, and rebuilt it. Now, it stood in the midst of green hills in what had once been desert. It was beautiful and stately and Celeste, in fact, was now ruler of the Universe. For nowhere were there any to oppose her.

She had revived the ancient practices and the ancient cruelties. And men and women hated her. Her beauty was a thing of hate to them. But she held the power and there were none to oppose her. And in a dungeon far below the palace floors, a cage stood. Guarding it was a gargantuan black, and within the steel bars a gaunt skeleton, wearing a girdle of venom.

THE river ran sluggishly between banks overgrown with rushes. A small, lean man paced back and forth nervously on a narrow path which paralleled the river. Every so often, he would pause and look carefully along the width of the dark water. Suddenly he stopped at the sound of something which came to him.

He stood tense, and then, as he recognized the sound, relaxed and awaited the boat's arrival. There were two men

in the boat. They were dressed in the armor of the Inner Guards of Celeste's palace. Sarko placed his fingers in his mouth and let an odd whistle escape. The men recognized the sound and paddled the boat to where he was waiting.

"Have you found him?" Sarko asked in breathless haste.

"We have," said the taller of the two gravely. "I, myself, have seen him when I took a warder's place. I gave him his stinking food, food not fit for a dog . . ."

Sarko wept when he heard what had been done to Makin. But they were tears of anger. In a moment, he recovered and told his plan. One of the men divested himself of his armor and changed into Sarko's dress, while Sarko placed the armor on his body. The fit was so good, it was as though the suit of armor had been made for Sarko.

"My men are waiting you," Sarko said. "You will lead them in the darkness of the night to the city. There are not many of us. But we will be enough to overthrow the palace guards."

"We need no more than fifty. Once the battle begins, Celeste's men will flock to us like sheep. But we must first have Makin," the tall guard said.

"That will be your problem," Sarko said. "If I can but get to him."

"First we must pass the giant, Nonto," said the guard. "But come. The night is not far off."

Arrangements had been well made. The captain of the Inner Guards was in on the plot. Sarko and his friend took the place of the warders who usually brought Makin his food.

Nonto seemed asleep. But he heard the sounds of their sandals on the stones and stirred and arose, stretching to his immense height. He recognized the taller guard, and seeing Sarko with him assumed they were the usual two

who sometimes substituted for the warders. He stepped aside as they came close to the cage, and waited for them to throw the food onto the floor as was usually done.

While Nonto was watching, one of the guards said, "I left something at the stairs. I will return in a moment."

THE other nodded and began to throw the food into the cage. Nonto was so busy watching him that he did not see the first guard whirl and leap toward him. The short sword bit deeply into his flesh. He screamed—an animal sound of pain. The second guard stopped the cry with a knife blade into Nonto's throat. The giant collapsed like a pricked balloon.

"Makin, Makin, my great one!" Sarko moaned as he chopped at the wooden bars. The other guard said nothing, but his strokes bit deep of the wood. It did not take long. They gasped as they stepped gingerly into the cage, so powerful was the horrible odor.

And though the darkness was almost complete, the voice which came to them from a far corner held instant recognition: "Sarko! You at last! I knew you would come."

They held him between them as they staggered up the stairs. In the far distance they could hear the clash of arms and, more dimly, the sound of men's voices raised in the shouts of battle.

"We can't bring him into that," Sarko said. "He is too weak."

"Give me a sword," Makin gasped. "Better to die with one in my hand." But even as he stretched a hand for the blade, Makin groaned desperately.

"What's wrong?" Sarko asked.

"This—this girdle. There seems to be venom in it which makes me weak as a woman and pains like liquid fire in my veins," Makin replied. "I can't bear to have it touched. I can't touch a weapon,

or even use my fists."

They had noticed, as they were helping him onward, that Makin would groan in pain now and then. But they had thought it because of his general weakness.

"Do you think you could bear the pain of a ride?"

"I can bear anything, if only it leads to revenge on her," Makin said in a dull voice.

"Then we'll take you to my encampment," Sarko decided. "It was a mistake to think you would be of use in the palace. However, the attack will take any attention away from the crypt. Yes, by the time they discover the giant's body, we will be safe."

MAKIN stood between two saplings, his hands stretched so that his fingers curled about the slender trunks. Facing him were Sarko and Hamon and the whole troop of their followers. Sarko was on his knees, his face close to the girdle.

"What do you see?" Makin asked. His face had already lost its gauntness and his chest and shoulders no longer looked as if they had but bones and nothing else to them.

"There is a knot in front," Sarko said. "Therefore, human hands must have tied it. But those hands must have been immune to the girdle's touch. We but touch it and intense pain is felt by you and by us. It is as if the knot enclosed a circuit of some sort."

"Then I am to wear this the rest of my life?" Makin asked hollowly.

Sarko arose and removed his sword. He stepped back a pace and looked deeply into Makin's eyes.

"My great friend," Sarko said, "I do not know the consequences of what I propose. But somewhere in the back of my mind there is a remembrance of a knot like this. A famous warrior con-

fronted by it solved the puzzle of its unravelling by a simple expedient. Trust me, Makin."

"To the death," Makin said.

Sarko then took two steps to the side, lifted his sword on high and brought it down with a vicious slice. The blade came within a hair's breath of striking Makin. It missed, however. But it did not miss the knot of hair. The girdle fell from about Makin's waist.

"Free!" Makin whispered. Then, in a shout, "Free!"

They embraced him, carassed him, held him close, some with tears in their eyes, but all with a new-born hope in their hearts. The mighty Makin was free.

If Makin's body had been slave to the girdle, his mind had never been. From the first moment, he had planned the form of his revenge. In a few terse words, he got the answers from Sarko that he wanted. He looked about the encampment hidden among the giant trees and saw that his forces were few, saw that he had but little to work with, and that he stood but little chance of winning. But Makin had not conquered the Universe by giving up at the sight of obstacles. He had learned from experience that what couldn't be broken down or gotten over, could be sidestepped.

He called Hamon and Sarko to his side, gave orders for the rest to disperse, and the three men held a council of war. Makin unfolded his ideas, carefully thought out as he had rotted away in the foul, dank dungeon:

"We can't win by frontal assault. The woman has her city and palace too well guarded. Infiltration, deception, revolt in far provinces. Those are our weapons. Here is my plan . . ."

CELESTE sat upon her golden throne, a blazing fury in her eyes,

her lips drawn down in anger. Bekoff bowed low before her. On either side of him were his generals. They, too, bowed.

"Six months have passed!" Celeste declared wrathfully. "What have you done? Nothing! My provinces blaze in revolt, and when my armies reach there the fire is out and another fire burns somewhere else. Even here, in my city, there is revolt. Your stupid guards permitted my Nonto to be killed, Makin to be freed. Thank my Gods he must still wear the girdle. Else all might be lost."

"Time, my Queen!" Bekoff said. "A little more time. Sarko is clever. But he always needed Makin. He will slip one day."

"More time, eh, Bekoff?" Celeste said, softly. "Very well. Another week then. I want Sarko's head before me. Remember, one week, or . . ."

She was to get her wish. Sarko's head was to be in her palace within one week. Only it was still attached to his shoulders, and not on a silver platter as she had wished for it to be. Makin had planned all. The idea he had in mind was to disperse and spread Celeste's forces so thinly and so far apart when he did make the attack that they could never reach her in time. His plan worked to perfection.

More, as time went by, Makin gained recruits, and trained them well, until at the end he had a strong army of warriors. A thousand men had volunteered to sacrifice their lives in an open city revolt, the idea being to tie up Celeste's forces. Makin was to make the real assault at an appointed hour. It all went off like clockwork.

The final scene was like a gigantic tableau for a super-colossal stage setting. Bekoff and his personal guard fled to the palace itself. They knew it was to be a battle to the death. There

was but a single entrance to the court proper. Bekoff had set the best of his warriors to guard that entrance. But Makin and his men won through.

Now they faced each other: Bekoff, the traitor, and Makin, backed by Sarko and Hamon. The Queen was on her throne, a look of complete indifference in her eyes and bearing. But her tiny hands were clenched on the arms of the throne.

The giant figure of Makin dominated the scene. A terrible look of vengeance was on his face. The woman's eyes went wide and fear-stricken when she saw what hung on his belt. Makin saw the look, and smiled. He pulled the girdle free and held it aloft. Then, lifting his sword on high, he shouted:

"The steel for Bekoff, and the girdle for the woman!"

IT WAS a fierce and terrible fight while it lasted. And it was to the death. Makin was face to face with Bekoff, while his two guards held the struggling Celeste. The traitor's sword dripped red, as did Makin's. They looked at each other for an instant of silence, then leaped forward as if they were going to embrace. The steel clashed and clanged as they thrust and parried. Neither took a backward step. But Makin's was an avenging sword, Bekoff's but one of protection. Once or twice Makin beat the other's steel back, only to have Bekoff recover. The third time, Bekoff was a fraction of a second too late. Makin's sword came in low and ripped into the other man's belly until the tip of the blade came out of Bekoff's back. Makin left his sword in the body, turned and ran up the three steps to the throne. He seized the woman, dragged her down, stripped her clothes from her and tied the girdle about her middle.

She was numb with fear. Makin was

breathing in stertorous gasps. At the last, he whipped out his keen-bladed knife, and with two swipes cut her lustrous hair off her head. It was with this hair that he made the final knot.

"Now," he said, "you are as I was. I swore an oath I would do this when the time came. Your limbs will rot, your body lose its flavor, your eyes their beauty, your hands become like sapless branches, your . . ."

He recoiled in sudden revulsion from her. For with the tying of the last knot, a terrible change came over her. A horrible odor filled the air, while yellow, pus-like bile spilled from every pore in her body. Her flesh literally melted from her bones. And in a matter of minutes, there was nothing left but a skeleton. But the greatest horror of all

was when words came from the skull:

"And again Samson won. How long now, mighty Gods, must I wait for my day?"

Then the whole skeleton vanished in a puff of wind, leaving behind acrid ashes which lay on the floor. There was nothing left of her . . .

"A girdle of venom and a woman of dust," Sarko said to himself. "The sign of the past and the hope of the future. Perhaps we have reached the millennium? Perhaps Utopia can now really be?"

But in his eyes was a puzzled wonder, for in her words there had been prophecy . . . prophecy for a day long in the future when her evil beauty might again make its appearance.

THE END

BY THE STARS



By FRANCES YERXA



ALL talk of the future is centered around the use of guided missiles—in peace as well as in war—but mostly in the latter state. Guided missiles of course, refer to rocket or jet driven machines whose speeds are well over that of sound and whose primary purpose is to carry a load of explosive to the enemy, and most likely the "load of explosive" will be the atomic bomb.

The last war saw the use of guided missiles on a small scale. The Germans with their remotely controlled planes ("Ferngesteuertflugzeuge"), their V-1's and V-2's, their anti-aircraft rockets and the like, pioneered in this field. Against Japan we too used some guided missiles. All of these types of machines depended for guidance on one of two things, radio control, or built-in mechanical course-controllers (gyroscopes linked with servomotors and pre-setting mechanisms).

These two methods of control of guided missiles have a number of drawbacks. The built-in controls can usually be set only so accurately, and since their control is out of the operator's hands once the missile has been launched, nothing can be done to correct any errors that may accumulate. No matter how refined these controls are made, a certain error is always inherent in them. This was well demonstrated by the limited accuracy of the V-1's and the V-2's.

As far as radio-controlled missiles go, an even

greater difficulty exists. So long as the missile is guided from its launching station by radio waves, it is under accurate control—but, the enemy can produce radio waves of the same frequency and easily interfere with the operation of the missile, perhaps even reversing its course and sending it like a boomerang back from whence it came.

It is apparent then that neither of the present obvious methods of guiding missiles is suitable. Let's see then what the problem is exactly.

Is there some sort of natural method of guiding a missile? Immediately we think of the Earth's magnetic field. Would it be possible to build in the missiles some mechanism which could use the magnetic lines of force that envelope the Earth as a sort of net to guide it to its destination? Yes, that can be done. But it too has a drawback. The Earth's magnetic field is constantly changing. That introduces errors between the time of launching of the missile and its arrival at its end. Furthermore, the enemy can create magnetic fields easily which of course would conflict with the missile's course. So that's out.

Is there another natural phenomenon which could be made use of? Well, we might use the varying intensity of cosmic rays as a sort of map with which to guide a missile. The trouble there is that the enemy can possibly create artificial radiations and in addition too little is known of

their magnitude, and location.

Can we, then, think of any fixed reference system? A moment's reflection will bring forth the most obvious of them all—the stars! Men navigate ships and planes by the stars. Cannot a mechanism be built to automatically guide a missile by starlight. It can. In fact, today this is one of the most important hush-hush projects of all governments.

The guided missile can be controlled by pre-setting it to suitable stars, or for that matter the sun can act as a control. Built in the missile, are sensitive heat-measuring devices known as holometers. These coupled with delicate photo-electric cells, can be used to sense direction and once set on prearranged and preselected stars, the missile can be sent on its way without the possibility of any interference on the part of the enemy.

WHAT a marvel of optical and mechanical construction such a "mechanical brain" must be! There must be an optical train of lenses within the missile, which serve to gather the light from the stars. Then this light is sent to holometers and photo-electric cells which produce electrical currents—minute—which are amplified, and used to control little relays and motors which in turn operate the controls of the jet or rocket! Each missile must exceed, in complexity, the watchmaker's finest work.

It has been suggested that strong radio waves will control guided missiles as long as the waves cannot be affected by the enemy. Then after the major portion of the journey has been completed, the star-guided section of the controls will take over. When the rocket or jet arrives at its intended destination, automatic apparatus takes over from here, points it at the target and accelerates it to very high velocities, so high that

the automatic computing machines of the enemy's anti-missile net cannot take hold.

Perhaps this sounds easier than it really is. Automatic guidance of vehicles of any sort is difficult—it is a thousand times more difficult when your every effort is being hampered by an enemy who is highly desirous of not seeing your machines so close-up. Nevertheless, a vast industry must be concentrated on this program.

Fortunately, the United States can stand well in the forefront of the development of automatic guiding mechanisms. Our precision industries are so highly developed, we have such a multitude of skilled establishments, many of which were devoted to civilian pursuits, that we can rest assured that certainly no one in this world has anything to even remotely approach us.

Unfortunately, time is on the side of the weaker. Knowledge diffuses rapidly these days through the medium of print and radio waves. So we must not rest on our laurels, but instead, must keep our shops and laboratories operating at their highest intensity. Fortunately we are doing just that.

It would be interesting to get an unrestricted peek into what the labs employed by the Army and the Navy and the Air Force are doing. Whatever it is, it must be tremendous, because even the present information could not be gleaned, if it were not regarded as common knowledge.

The next time you look at the stars, remember, that for all their beauty, they may be the guiders of the carriers of death. As civilization gets more complex, it gets more deadly! What will the end be? Maybe Man is destined to disappear, and maybe the Earth is destined to be a cold black body circling endlessly beneath the unblinking brilliance of the billions of stars that played an unwitting part in devastating it!

FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH



By FRAN FERRIS



JOHAN C. BROWN, sixty-one-year-old farmer and pharmacist, thinks he has found the secret that will prolong the natural life span from seventy years to one hundred and twenty years. Representatives of the U. S. Department of Pure Foods and Drugs called on Mr. Brown. They took a cement matrix back to their laboratories to make further scientific investigations. Each matrix holds a Fountain of Youth master cell which

the inventor claims has magical powers to prolong life and increase the size and quality of all plant and animal life. The new discovery is not a chemical, not a drug, nor a narcotic. Mr. Brown explains that the health-giving properties of his discovery will reach the person through the digestive tract. If people will eat only plant and animal products that have been rendered free from disease by the master cell.

THE STRANGE TEA OF TING SUN FU

A Terrific Story by Lee Francis



COMING NEXT MONTH



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ON SALE JANUARY 10

The INSANE PLANET

By Alexander Blade



The two-headed beast charged forward, roaring loudly, intent on their doom

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No world could be as dangerous as this one, because it was impossible to predict what would happen next—and incredibly mad and deadly things were always happening next!

GREGORY PETERS felt his body grow tense before the controls of the rocket ship. His eyes, peering intently into the visiplat, were held by a grim fascination at what he saw there. For what he saw was nothing.

There should have been stars on the plate. There should have been the brilliant outline of the fifth planetary system of Sirius. There should have been the eye-searing brightness of

Sirius itself. There should have been—
There was nothing.

Cold, black nothing. A nothingness so intense it was palpable. It was as if the universe had ceased to exist; it was as if a chasm had opened in space, space that was a chasm in itself. Blackness so intense it whirled before his eyes.

"We're approaching it, Peters, we're in the field of Planet X right now."

Peters heard the words and pulled his



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eyes from the visiplate. He stared at the figure of Hal Bradley standing close beside him. Bradley's face was lit by an intense excitement. There was a look of eagerness on Bradley's face, an eagerness that Peters felt was strangely out of place. It seemed odd to him that of two men alone in a rocket ship hurtling into the black maw of what might well be their grave in space, one of them should be eager, actually impatient to meet his death.

"It's too late to turn back now, Bradley," Peters said quietly.

Bradley pulled his eager eyes from the visiplate and stared at Peters with an intensity that shocked Peters almost as much as the blackness they were hurtling into.

"Turn back? Don't be a fool, man! Nothing could stop me now, do you hear, nothing!"

The wild light in Bradley's eyes made Peters look away. He was even glad to look back into the visiplate at the terrible blackness the ship was plunging into.

A sudden fear overwhelmed Peters. It was a fear, not of man or the things of man, but a dread of the unknown, of things worse than death. As the feeling swept over him, Peters' hand tightened on the controls of the ship. It would be so easy to twist his wrist and send the ship zooming away from the blackness, away from the terrible presence of Planet X and back to the worlds men knew and understood.

Even as the thought raced through Peters' mind, his hand began to turn the controls.

"Don't touch those controls, Peters!"

Peters, jarred back to sudden awareness, twisted his head and saw Bradley, an insane light in his eyes, training a gun on him. Shocked surprise flooded Peters' face.

"Bradley! Put that gun away—have

you gone mad?"

Bradley laughed, a short snapping laughter. "You heard what I said. *Turn those controls back!* I mean what I say, Peters, I'll kill you where you stand!"

It was Peters' turn to laugh. And he laughed in Bradley's distorted features. "Kill me, Bradley? Isn't that something of an empty threat? Aren't you forgetting I have less than three months to live as it is?"

But Bradley was not to be put off. "Three months or one second, I'll kill you, Peters. *Turn back those controls!*"

PETERS' face sobered. It was all too apparent that Bradley meant what he said. Peters did not try to reason it out. There was no time for such thought now. That Bradley, a top scientist in atomic radiation, had suddenly seemed to go insane mattered little. What did matter, suddenly, was the fact that Peters knew he did not want to die—yet. He had come a long way through space to find this blackness, and before he died he wanted to pierce it, discover what lay beyond it, if anything.

"All right, Bradley, there's no reason to get excited, my hand slipped on the controls."

It wasn't exactly the truth, Peters knew, but he had no desire to tell Bradley at that moment the real reason his hand had changed the controls of the ship.

With a deft movement Peters twisted the control lever back to its original position, and as he stared into the visiplate, the blackness seemed to grow more intense.

And then suddenly the quiet of the control cabin was invaded by a sound. It was dim at first, and Peters' ears strained to catch it, a faint vibrant hum. Then it grew. And suddenly it

was loud, a hum that became a terrible vibration, shaking the very walls of the ship, sending protesting groans of tortured metal through the air.

Peters stood rooted to the spot. He couldn't believe his ears. He knew they were hurtling through nothingness, a black intense void, and yet it was as if a giant hand had closed over the ship outside, a hand that was squeezing it, twisting, causing the walls of the vessel to shriek in agony.

And then suddenly Peters' eyes saw something on the visiplane. Out of the utter blackness, the maw of vacuous eternity that seemed to have enveloped the ship, there in the center of the visiplane a bright spot of light appeared.

It was in the exact center of the screen, a pulsing brilliant light, that wavered, shimmered, expanded with each passing second.

And then suddenly the ship careened, seemed to turn on end, and but for the safety straps that held Peters and Bradley to their position before the control panel, they would have been thrown violently against the ceiling of the ship.

"You fool!" Peters heard Bradley shouting above the roar that grew in the ship. "The controls! We're running wild!"

Peters fought futilely to control the ship. But though he twisted the controls madly, the ship refused to respond. The roar inside the control cabin grew in intensity, and the ship spun crazily through the void, sending Peters' senses reeling.

It was then the paralysis hit them.

Peters felt it, an instantaneous wave that swept through him, numbing his body, making his members incapable of movement. He was suddenly a disembodied spirit, a mind encased in a frozen sheath of flesh. Only his mind moved. But even that seemed crazy.

For his thoughts were not rational. He could not concentrate on his surroundings. He was aware only that the ship was caught by a black maelstrom, that a giant hand seemed to have grabbed it and suddenly threw it with a herculean force toward a growing disk of light that grew on the visiplane.

Then the thought left him. Another thought took its place. This was it. The answer to what had happened to the first expedition to Planet X. Peters' senses reeled. Curiously, he seemed to be back on Earth. He was in the office of Administrator Howard, of the Planetary Research Institute. He was staring at the intense frown on the Administrator's face.

"I suppose you realize that the trip you are volunteering for may well prove to be fatal, Peters," Howard had said.

Peters had nodded grimly. "I am aware of that, sir. But I am also aware that my time is limited. The accidental exposure to the radiation of the new isotope we discovered has left me with an incurable disease of the blood. You are well aware of that fact, are you not?"

THE Administrator's features softened. "I'm well aware of it, yes. I only wish there were some medical way to help you, but—"

"There isn't," Peters concluded for him. "And since there isn't, I am the logical one to go to Planet X."

Howard sighed. For a moment he remained silent, then suddenly he sat forward in his chair.

"Peters, the task you are facing is no ordinary one. As you know, the discovery of Planet X was made not more than six months ago. Our astronomers based on the Moon found a black spot in space around the vicinity of Sirius. As you also know, we sent an investigating ship to that black spot. It con-

tained three of our top scientists. Constant touch was kept with the ship en-route to the spot we termed Planet X. Then abruptly, contact was broken, and we have never heard from those men again.

"Now Peters, that incident is something we cannot afford to ignore. The fact that three top men have vanished in space is important enough, but the fact that this black area has thus far proven insoluble to our most sensitive instruments is even more important. We must know what that area is. But to find out will necessitate an almost suicidal mission. You may never return alive. But knowing the hazard you face beforehand may be the knowledge you will need to make your mission a success. Are you still determined to go?"

Peters nodded. "I am ready to leave at once."

Howard sat back, his features relaxed and sober. "Good. Then it's settled. You and Dr. Hal Bradley will leave within a week."

Peters stared at the Administrator. "Did I hear you correctly, sir? Did you say that Hal Bradley was going on this mission?"

Howard nodded. "I did. And I might add that though I protested, I was overruled by higher authority. I mean this as no offense, Peters, but you have nothing to lose, while Bradley is risking a brilliant career as one of our foremost nuclear physicists. It seems that Bradley has his own reasons for wanting to go, reasons of which I have been kept ignorant. But he has powerful connections in the Council, and his request has been granted over my protest."

Peters' eyes had clouded with a perplexed look. "I've always had a great respect for Bradley's work, but this seems somewhat of a foolhardy gesture

on his part, sir."

Howard shrugged. "Exactly what I told him myself. But Bradley is a peculiar man. I sometimes wonder what goes on in his mind. . . . However, that is neither here nor there. The fact remains that he will accompany you. It is also a pertinent fact that with two scientists of your reputation making the trip, armed with the knowledge of the danger you face, that the trip may prove to be less hazardous. That's about it, Peters. Just remember, that we're counting on you. Don't take any unnecessary chances. Gather all the data you can, and return."

The scene faded from Peters' mind. Once again his senses reeled. When they cleared he relived the first few days aboard the rocket ship. He saw himself studying the lean, hard features of Hal Bradley, the top scientist who was willing to risk his life on a mad trip into the unknown.

"What would you think, Peters, if I told you that you were on the verge of discovering one of the great secrets of the universe?" Bradley had said.

Peters had smiled. "You speak as if you had personal knowledge of the black spot we call Planet X, Bradley."

Bradley's face had clouded then. And he became evasive.

"Pure speculation, Peters," he said abruptly. "Pure speculation."

But his tone belied his words, and Peters became positive from that moment on that Bradley knew more than he was telling. That within his mind lay a secret, a secret so important that he had volunteered to risk his life to verify it. Peters pondered that, but the more he pondered it, the more confused he became.

AND as the days crept by, Peters had noticed the change in Bradley. As the black spot in space came closer,

Bradley became more uncommunicative. He seemed lost in the introspection of his thoughts. And when he spoke, it was as if he were a different person, his manner abrupt, almost abusive.

And there was a strange light in Bradley's eyes. A cunning gleam that in another man Peters would have taken for an acute stage of madness. A dangerous stage, certainly not in keeping with the scientific mind now harboring it.

"If I'm right, Peters, it means power! More power than any man has ever known! Power that can bend the universe to my will!"

"To your will, Bradley?" Peters had asked quietly.

And again the evasive look, the clouding of the scientist's eyes.

"Power, Peters—for all men."

The roaring blotted out the thought. Again Peters was aware of his immediate surroundings. He was brought back to them by a sudden shifting of the ship, a terrific twist that nearly tore the control panel from the wall.

And then suddenly there was quiet.

For a moment Peters remained stunned, almost unbelieving that the roar had ceased. And then he found that the paralysis that had gripped him had vanished. And as he flexed his muscles in movement, he became aware also that the blackness had vanished from the visiplat.

"Look! Peters—it's a world—look!"

Bradley's voice sounded hoarsely, tense with excitement beside him. And Peters looked.

It was indeed a world. A world that had appeared out of nowhere. A world ringed not by a blue sky above, but by a limitless blackness. It became apparent to Peters in a rush that their ship had sailed straight through that blackness, and that the dark spot in space was a ring that covered a planet—this

planet.

"The controls, man! We're falling out of control!"

Bradley's voice came harshly to Peters. But already Peters' hands were busy with the controls of the ship. And this time they responded to his touch. The ship stopped its mad errant plunge toward the surface of the planet. Deftly Peters cut down on the power, slowing the vessel.

"That bright spot, do you see it, Peters?"

Peters gazed into the visiplat at the surface of the planet they were rapidly approaching. The air, if air it was, seemed vibrantly alive, giving a distorted view of the terrain below. Peters saw strange rolling plains and tangled forests. And then suddenly the forest and plains seemed to vanish, shift positions, and then reappear. It was uncanny, unreal, almost as if he were viewing the surface of the Earth through weirdly distorted lenses.

And then he saw the bright spot Bradley was pointing to with a tense finger.

It seemed to glow with a shimmering light, and as they approached it, Peters felt a strange eeriness creep through him. Again that feeling of the unknown. Unconsciously Peters turned the vessel away from that glowing spot.

"You fool!" Bradley screamed. "Give me those controls! That bright spot is what we're looking for!"

Peters felt Bradley's hands tearing at his, as the man tried to take the controls away from him.

Sudden anger flamed through Peters. He had taken quite a bit from Bradley during the past hour. More than he had ever taken from any man. Now his anger overflowed.

"I'm landing this ship!" Peters snapped out, and his right hand tore at Bradley's grasping fingers.

The scientist let out an animal sound of rage and smashed his fist into Peters' jaw. For a moment Peters staggered against his safety strap, but he clung desperately to the controls with one hand.

But the damage was done, Peters saw in a flash. The ship, gliding down smoothly toward the shimmering terrain below, suddenly bolted out of control as Bradley wrestled with the controls.

A sudden lurch threw Bradley back away from Peters, and as the ground loomed up at them, Peters moved with lightning speed, his fingers opening the forward retarding rocket ports.

The ship slowed instantly, but not quick enough. The visiplat became blurred with a sudden overwhelming rush of looming rock, and then the ship settled to the ground with a rending jolt.

Peters was thrown violently against Bradley and then both men struck the control panel.

Peters' senses left him in a dizzy agony of sudden pain.

PETERS regained consciousness with a dull throbbing pain in his head. For a moment he stared around him in a daze, then memory came flooding back. A cold sense of fear took hold of him momentarily as he realized that the rocket ship had made a crash landing upon Planet X, a world of which they knew nothing.

Peters moved away from the control panel, aware that his safety strap had snapped in the crash. He became aware also that Bradley was standing a few feet away, rubbing his jaw where a thin trickle of blood had appeared.

"Well, Bradley, I hope you're satisfied," Peters said.

Bradley fixed steady eyes on him.

"If you had let me handle the con-

trols we wouldn't have crashed," the scientist replied tartly. "As it is, there isn't too much damage done. I checked the ship while you were still unconscious, and only the forward tubes are damaged. A few days' repairs will fix that."

Peters felt a sudden anger rise inside him. So Bradley had left him lie unconscious while he calmly inspected the ship! But then the anger faded as Peters frowned.

"You inspected the ship? You mean you've been outside without checking the atmospheric content?"

Bradley smiled but shook his head. "I haven't been outside yet. I checked the firing tubes. It was simple enough. . . . As for *going* outside, I intend to do that shortly. I *have* checked the atmosphere, and basically, it is the same as that of our own planet. Of course, there is the radiation to contend with, but our protective radi-suits will take care of that."

Peters nodded dully, his head still aching. "If we start now, we can repair the damage in—"

"We're not going to repair anything right now," Bradley cut in. "Have you forgotten that we came here for a purpose?"

"That's exactly what you seem to have forgotten," Peters replied. "We know now that the black spot in space is some kind of a shield for this world. Our report should be made as soon as possible."

Bradley shook his head again. "The tele-radio is damaged. I've already checked that. And besides, we can't make a full report unless we investigate. If you had landed close to that bright spot as I told you to our work would have been simpler. As it is, I intend to investigate with or without you."

There was a cold animosity in Brad-

ley's words that Peters did not miss. But as the scientist talked, Peters felt his own interest aroused. There was something strange about this world, a world circled by an envelope of utter blackness. Why? And what had happened to the first expedition and the three top men—Wilson, Berendt, and Foster—were they still alive?

"All right, Bradley, maybe you're right. But just what makes you so interested in that bright spot? You talk as if you know something the Planetary Research Institute doesn't."

Bradley's eyes clouded for a moment. When he spoke it was with a shrug.

"I don't know any more about it than you do, Peters. But I do know that some powerful radiation emanates from it, and I intend to find out just what it is."

PETERS took the words without comment. Inwardly he knew he didn't believe Bradley. There was something furtive in the man's manner. Something that said more than his words implied. As he thought about it he became even more puzzled. Why had Bradley demanded to go on this trip through space, a trip from which three top scientists had never returned when they made it? And why did Bradley evince so much interest, and almost, knowledge, in a bright spot that had appeared out of nowhere on this strange world?

Peters put the thoughts from his mind as Bradley began donning his protective radi-suit. Peters followed suit in silence. Lastly he huddled on his gun belt and made sure the proton gun was fully charged. As he did this he saw Bradley watching him intently. For a moment Peters saw the strange light again in Bradley's eyes. It was as if the man were plotting something in the deepness of his inner thoughts.

"All right, Bradley, I'm ready," Peters said.

Bradley only nodded and stepped to the air lock. He depressed the control button and the lock hissed open. Bradley jumped the three feet distance to the surface of the planet, and Peters followed.

Almost at once Peters felt a queer sensation. It wasn't the way the wind whipped around them, or the feel of the ground beneath his feet. It was something in the air, something that he could see, and yet not see.

They were standing on the slope of a rocky hill. Off in the distance ahead loomed a range of mountains. To the right a long limitless plain, tall grass waving in the breeze. And to the left a flat expanse of desert.

It was then that Peters received the real shock. As he turned around to gaze at what lay behind them, he saw a mountain of ice and snow reaching up toward the sky! And as he gazed at the sky itself he saw nothing but a black obscurity, stretching from horizon to horizon.

Beside him, he heard Bradley suck in his breath sharply as he saw the same thing.

"It's uncanny!" Peters heard Bradley say.

Dazedly Peters had to agree. It was not only uncanny, it was impossible! Mountains ahead; grassy plains to the right; blazing desert left—and behind, ice and snow! And with it all, the very air seemed to shimmer in waves, as if everything Peters looked at were nothing but an illusion. It was a situation that could not exist, Peters knew. But it did.

"Look, Peters, over by that mountain range!"

Peters looked. He saw a bright shaft of iridescence shooting up into the sky to vanish into the envelope of blackness

that covered the world. It seemed to come from somewhere in that range of towering bills. And as Peters judged the distance, it could not have been more than ten miles.

"It's the spot!" Bradley cried excitedly, and before Peters could reply, the scientist had started moving toward it.

Peters hurried after him and caught up.

"Bradley! This is foolhardy—just take a look around you—how do we know what we're liable to run into!"

Bradley moved faster, his eyes fastened in eagerness upon the flooding brilliance far ahead.

And then suddenly the scientist stopped in his tracks. And Peters, a few steps behind him, stopped too.

The air had suddenly whipped itself to a frenzy and the hills ahead seemed bathed in a weird glow. And then they vanished. And in their place was a desert!

A weird chill crept through Peters. And as his eyes switched to the left, he saw the hills were now where the desert had been!

"Bradley!" Peters choked out. "Did you see that too?"

FOR the first time an uneasy look appeared in the eyes of the scientist. Slowly he nodded his head, and then suddenly he turned around, and as Peters stared at him, he saw Bradley's face blanch.

Peters twisted around even as Bradley's voice came hoarsely.

"The ship! It's gone!"

Peters looked behind where they had just come from. Seconds before there had been light, and the ship could not have been more than two hundred yards from them. Now an impenetrable wall of darkness met his eyes, a wall of night that had appeared magically, impossi-

bly, blotting out everything behind it.

"It's insane! This world is mad, Peters!"

Peters heard the other man's words as if from a great distance. And then Peters knew that the same thought had been in his own mind. Yes, this world *was* mad. Mad with weird forces at work which he could not cope with, could not comprehend.

There was only one thought in Peters' mind at that moment. He knew that somehow they had to return to the ship—before it was too late. But how? Could they possibly hope to find *anything* in that utter blackness?

Peters came to a rapid decision. If they continued like this there would be no way out but death. And Peters knew it wasn't a fear of dying that influenced him. He had a mission to perform. The Council on Earth must receive a report on this mystery world. It must be barred from all transport. Peters knew that he must return to the ship.

"Bradley!" Peters faced the scientist with determined eyes. "We can't go any further on this planet. We're going to return to the ship—if we can find it—and begin repairs. It's our only chance."

Bradley's lips tightened. Suddenly he drew his gun and trained it on Peters. Then a grim smile formed on Bradley's face.

"I should have gotten rid of you before, Peters, but I thought you'd be some use to me. No, we're not going to return to the ship. That is, you're not going to. Throw your gun to the ground."

Peters stared at the man in shocked surprise. But there was no denying the purpose in Bradley's eyes. Slowly Peters drew his gun and tossed it to the ground at Bradley's feet. Bradley stooped quickly and picked up the

weapon.

"Bradley, have you gone mad?" Peters snapped.

Bradley shook his head slowly.

"No, Peters, I'm not mad. I'm going to let you in on a little secret though before you die. All during the trip here you were wondering just why I came along. Weren't you?"

Peters nodded.

"I thought so. Well, I'll tell you now, Peters. You see, I know what happened to the first expedition. I talked to Professor Wilson myself!"

Peters stared at Bradley in dazed surprise. "But that's impossible—"

"Impossible? Not quite. You see, I didn't talk to Wilson over the tele-radio. I received a telepathic message from him!"

PETERS could only stare at the other man. He was certain now that Bradley had lost his mind. There could be no other explanation for his actions. Telepathy was still only a word in the scientific textbooks. Peters listened as Bradley went on.

"That bright spot, Peters. You haven't the faintest idea of what it is. It's not just a ray of light. It's a pool of living energy, the vital energy of the cosmos itself!"

"As you may or may not know, Wilson was a close friend of mine. When I first received his telepathic message I thought I had gone mad. But then as Wilson unfolded his story to me, I knew that I had in my grasp a force—a weapon—so powerful it staggered the imagination.

"You see, Peters, the first expedition did reach this planet. And just as we, the ship crashed. However, Berendt and Foster were not as fortunate as we were. They were killed in the crash. Only Wilson was left alive.

"Wilson stumbled through the mad-

ness of evolution of this planet for days until he came to the pool of energy. He didn't know what it was, and by accident he fell into it. And now, Peters, get set for the shock of your life.

"As soon as Wilson's body hit the pool of energy, he *changed*. He *evolved* centuries in a split second. His body withered and vanished until only his mind remained. He was a living ego, Peters, an entity of pure intellect!

"But that isn't the best part. You see, Wilson studied this strange cosmic force. He found that because of it the evolution on this planet ran mad. He found that the only control over the force was *thought*. And he had contacted me to warn the Earth Council against coming to this world. For if this strange energy substance should fall into the wrong hands . . ."

Bradley's voice trailed off significantly. And Peters' mind was stunned. The scientist's words had been the words of a madman. And yet, Peters knew that what Bradley had said was not insanity. It must be the truth! And then the overwhelming fact became apparent to him. He knew now why Bradley was here. Why he had insisted on making the trip to Planet X.

"You're mad, Bradley!" Peters said suddenly. "No one man can harness a force like that. No one man can control the destiny of the universe!"

Bradley laughed. "I see you begin to understand. But you are wrong. I can control the energy. My *thoughts* can! I intend to find that pool and then I'll return to Earth. I'll bend the entire Planetary System to my will. I'll have the greatest weapon man ever dreamed of—the cosmic energy itself!"

Bradley's eyes flamed as his voice rose to a high pitch of excitement. Then suddenly the man's voice calmed, and when he spoke again it was with an icy determination.

"In a way I'm sorry you have to die, Peters. It's a shame to shorten your already doomed life, but I can't afford to let you live. However, I thought you'd like to know the truth before—"

Bradley's voice cut off abruptly. A terrible roar filled the air from behind the two men. Peters twisted around and felt a paralysis of dread grip him.

STANDING not three hundred yards away was a monster that might have been lifted out of some prehistoric age. It resembled a great dinosaur, towering nearly a hundred feet into the air. But unlike the dinosaur, this creature had two heads extending from twin, stem-like necks. Two huge mouths lined with gleaming teeth roared at them, and four huge blood-red eyes glared at the two men.

"My God!" Peters choked the words out. And even as he spoke he saw Bradley turn startled eyes toward the monster and lift the two proton guns.

And then Peters saw something else. Something that made his mouth drop open in shocked surprise.

Running swiftly toward them, from the hills where the bright shaft of iridescent radiance shown, was the figure of a girl.

She moved swiftly, her bare legs flashing over the uneven ground. Her body was clad in a short-skirted tunic that fit snugly to her. Her golden hair flew behind her in a stream as she ran.

Then Peters' gaze was torn from the rapidly approaching girl as another vast roar split the air. He turned to see the monstrous creature advancing upon them, its twin heads darting forward like striking snakes, its fanged jaws reaching out for them.

At the same moment Peters heard the guns in Bradley's hands blast out. Short, sharp, snapping sounds as the proton bullets sped from the weapons

in a dazzling discharge.

Then suddenly the girl had reached them. Her mouth moved forming words. But Peters didn't hear them. Instead, a thought leaped into his mind.

"The black veil! Run into the black veil!"

Her words meant nothing to Peters at the moment. He was stunned by the realization that she had not spoken, but that her thoughts had been imparted to him! He stared at her in amazement, his mind refusing to accept the fact that she existed, that the monster rushing down upon them existed, that this whole insane world existed. It must be a dream. A crazy dream. A nightmare that he would awaken from.

But the sharp crack of Bradley's guns was no nightmare. The sound shocked Peters into mobility.

The girl had grasped his arm and was pulling him frantically toward the shimmering wall of darkness a short distance away.

"Into the black veil! Molga cannot find you there!"

Peters cast one last look over his shoulder as he ran with the girl. He saw Bradley standing, the guns barking in his hands, and the monster bearing down upon him.

He saw one of the discharges from the proton guns hit the monster in one of its heads. There was a searing flash of flame and the head vanished.

Then, as the wall of darkness enveloped Peters and the girl, Peters saw one last thing. He saw the air shimmer between Bradley and the monster, and then the monster suddenly vanished.

Then everything was dark. Whether Bradley's shots had caused the creature to disappear, or whether it was something else, Peters didn't know. He was running through darkness, a blackness so intense it had substance. The

only hold on reality he maintained was the warm tight grip of the girl's hand in his.

HOW long they ran Peters didn't know. Time seemed to have stopped for him. But then suddenly the blackness became gray, and then the grayness gave way to light.

Peters stopped running. And the girl stopped with him.

He stood breathing heavily, watching as the girl's breast rose and fell beneath the strange silvery tunic. Unlike him she was breathing lightly, as if the exertion had not bothered her. And then Peters looked into her eyes.

They were the brightest sapphire blue Peters had ever seen. And the face around them was a delicate oval of soft, alluring beauty. Her golden hair fell softly around her shoulders now, and as he stared at her she pointed to his plasti-helmet. By her motions Peters realized she was telling him to remove it. Then her thought came.

"It is safe. You do not need your protective headpiece."

Peters removed the helmet and dropped it to the ground. Then the girl's lips moved, and as she spoke, he understood her.

"We are safe now. Molga could not follow us through the black veil. But your companion . . ."

Peters shook his head. "I'm afraid I hope my companion did not escape," he told her. "But the last thing I saw was the monster you call Molga vanishing."

The girl cocked her head sideways at that and a sigh escaped her lips. "Ah, then Molga evolved . . ."

Peters frowned at her words but paused to glance about him. They were standing on the edge of a forest that sloped up into the hills. Rocky gorges ran between the trees, and be-

fore Peters' startled eyes, he saw some of the trees vanish only to be replaced by saplings shooting from the ground, and in seconds to become forest giants.

He tore his gaze away from them and looked helplessly at the girl.

"Look, if you don't tell me where I am and what mad world this is, I'll lose my mind!"

The girl laughed at his words. "You are upset? . . . But of course I forget that you are from a strange planet."

At her words Peters couldn't hold back the sudden laughter that rose to his lips.

"Me from a strange planet? Oh, no, I run into dinosaurs every day! And a beautiful girl always rescues me! And I find it perfectly natural to see night where day should be and whole sections of land vanish before my eyes—and take those trees—I don't think there's anything strange about them popping out of the ground while it should take decades of growth—"

"I am sorry if I upset you . . ." the girl interrupted him, her face serious.

Peters stopped talking and the laughter died from his lips. He realized suddenly that his nerves had been close to the breaking point. He took a deep breath and got a grip on himself.

"Look, I guess I owe you something of an apology. I'm sorry I talked that way, but, well, you couldn't understand. Your world is completely alien to me. I don't begin to understand anything about it. I—"

"Weelsun said you would be confused." The girl said simply.

"Weelsun?" Peters repeated the name. Then suddenly his eyes lighted. "Wilson! You mean Wilson from Earth? You have seen him?"

THE girl nodded. "It was he who came to my people and told of your coming. And when I knew you had

landed in the Valley of the Veil I had to come because I knew you would be in danger."

Peters stopped her with a raised hand. "Would you mind going back a bit? Just who are you and where are your people?"

The girl smiled, and Peters felt a strange racing to his pulse at her smile.

"I am sorry. But of course I should have explained. I am Lorelle, daughter of Parno. My people live beyond the hills," she pointed to the forest hills and the glowing radiance of the energy pool Bradley had spoken of. "We live in one of the few areas where the Great Change does not take place. Nobody knows why this is so, why the Great Rays do not affect us there.

"My father, Parno, says it has to do with the thoughts of the Evolved Ones, that they have set aside certain places where life may go on as was planned, away from the Great Rays."

A dawning comprehension was forming in Peters' mind as the girl spoke. Though her words had not explained fully what he wanted to know, he began to see what she was trying to tell him.

"These Great Rays," he said, "you mean that they control evolution—that the *changes* I see are a product of evolution gone mad?"

"That is so. Even now we are in danger. No one can say how long it will take for the change to take hold once you are exposed to the Valley of the Veil. We must hurry from here. I will take you back to my people. There you will be safe."

"But you mentioned Wilson," Peters said doggedly. "You said you saw the Earthman."

The girl shook her head. "I saw him, yes. But not as I see you. Weelsun entered the Pool of the Great Ray. He has *changed* and is now one of the

Evolved Ones. He came to us in thought image and told of your coming. He said that he was afraid of one of you—Bradley—that he had made a mistake in telling him of the Great Ray's secret. He said that you were good and that you were in danger."

"But if this is all true, if Wilson has 'evolved' as you say, then why didn't he warn me himself?"

The girl shook her head and an awed look sprang into her eyes.

"Who is to say what the Evolved Ones may do? We can only be thankful that they favor us with small attentions in time of need. . . . Now we must hurry. We have a long way to travel."

Peters sighed. Then suddenly he gripped the girl's hand as she started to walk.

"Wait! What about the ship? If you could take me back to it—"

"It is too dangerous. We have waited too long as it is. And we are near the Karwa land. Even now they may have heard of our coming. No, we must go to my people."

PETERS shrugged in defeat. But inwardly he felt that he was glad. If he returned to the ship it meant that he would have to leave this insane world. And while the thought of spending his remaining days on the planet was not a healthy one in light of what the girl had said, still, Peters felt strangely of a sudden. There was something about Lorelle that fascinated him. Something he had never felt before in his life. An emotion that he refused to accept as anything but interest and curiosity. But he was glad he wasn't returning to the ship. And then he remembered that he had not as yet told her his name.

"Lorelle," he said, and the girl turned to him, "I haven't even told you my name. I am called Gregory Peters."

The girl smiled. "Gregory? That is

a nice name. I will call you Greg. Now, come, we have no more time to talk—Greg."

Peters smiled back at the girl and nodded.

As he followed the girl through the rocky gorges, he marveled at the way she moved along, like a gazelle, nimbly, swiftly, her eyes always moving, always seeing.

And though his heart felt suddenly light, lighter than it had ever felt, a disturbing thought ran through his mind. What had happened to Bradley? Would the man continue his mad plan and head for the pool of the Great Rays? Peters felt that he would. Bradley had come too far in quest of power to be thwarted now. And Peters knew, in that instant, that somehow he would meet Bradley again. That a wall had been built between the two men that would have to be crushed. And when that time came only one of them would remain alive.

Peters' thoughts were ended abruptly as the girl suddenly turned to him. There was a look of panic in her eyes, and then as Peters stared beyond her, his heart chilled.

They were at the end of the rocky gorge. Ahead lay a grass plain, and beyond it a towering forest stretching into the hills.

But suddenly the grass plain seemed to become alive, even as they stepped onto it. The air shimmered and as the distortion passed, Peters saw that the plain was filled with a writhing mass of gargantuan serpents.

A loud hissing smote the air and suddenly four of the huge snakes slithered through the grass toward them, fanged jaws gaping wide.

"It is the Veil!" the girl said, her breath catching in her throat.

Peters grabbed her hand and turned to run back through the gorge. But

even as he made the movement he knew they could never escape in time. The serpents were almost upon them.

Then suddenly the girl tore away from him. As Peters turned frantically to grab her, she suddenly stood facing the monsters, and her right hand shot out in a pointing gesture.

"Lorelle!" Peters shouted. "My God, look out—"

PETERS' voice broke off in mid-sentence. The first of the hissing serpents had almost reached them where they stood. Then, as the girl stared and pointed her finger at the creature, it suddenly vanished.

And seconds later, the rest of them had disappeared.

Lorelle's hand dropped limply to her side and Peters stared at her in open mouthed astonishment.

A faint smile crossed the girl's lips. "It is all right, Greg. The Veil was not strong enough that time."

All Peters could do was shoot a questioning look at her.

"It is very simple, Greg," she explained. "The only thing that can control the Veil and the Great Ray, its center, is thought. Those creatures, like Molga, do not exist in our time. But because of the rate of evolution of the Veil, they suddenly appeared, covering thousands of years of time in a moment. I simply *thought* them back where they came from. . . . But the Veil is strong, sometimes even thought cannot control it. We were very fortunate."

Peters' breath left him in a sigh. *Fortunate!* That was a gross understatement, he knew. And sudden new respect for this frail-appearing girl filled him.

"You saved my life once again," he said.

Her eyes looked troubled. "We must

burry, Greg. Now you understand why I said we were in danger."

Peters nodded soberly. He would no longer question her words. The sooner they got out of this insane section of the planet the better.

Lorelle moved more swiftly now. Peters half ran beside her as they crossed the grassy plain and then started into the forest that sloped up into the hills.

A deep quiet pervaded the woods as the trees closed behind them. It was almost as if they had entered a tomb of wooden giants. There was no sound of rustling leaves, no sound of bird life, or any life. Just the abnormal quiet.

The girl led the way through the giant timber, her feet making scarcely a sound on the soft carpet of the ground. Peters followed, his senses alert and watchful.

And as they continued, Peters had the uncomfortable feeling that they were being watched. It wasn't a sensation he could put his finger on, it was as if some sixth sense warned him.

And then suddenly the girl stopped. She turned to him, a puzzled look on her face.

"What's the matter, Lorelle?" Peters asked her.

She shook her head and glanced furtively around through the forest.

"I don't know. We are not in their land, but—"

Peters was about to ask her what she meant when the quiet of the forest was shattered.

A blood-curdling series of roars filled the air and suddenly a number of squat, lumbering, ape-like figures appeared from behind the trees directly ahead of them.

The girl let out a cry of terror.

"The Karwa! Greg—it is the Karwa!"

Even as the girl screamed the hairy

brutes moved swiftly toward them. As they approached Peters saw the look of triumph in their close-set piggy eyes. In a swift glance Peters saw that there were five of the brutes, their stubby legs pounding across the ground, their long forearms reaching out.

PETERS moved into action even as a cold stricture closed about his heart. He pulled the girl savagely behind him and stood to face the first of the beasts.

He didn't have long to wait. The creature leaped the remaining distance between them and its long arms spread out to fold Peters in their hairy grasp.

At the last second, Peters dove sideways and under the rush of the creature. His fist lashed out in a desperate blow at the brute's stomach. He felt his fist connect and sink into the soft stomach.

There was a rush of air from the creature's mouth. Its head-long drive abruptly stopped and a surprised roar issued from its throat as it sank to the ground in sudden collapse.

Peters moved quickly away from the sagging beast and saw the girl out of the corner of his eye. She had backed up against one of the trees and was staring in fear as the rest of the brutes closed in.

Peters launched himself swiftly to her side. Already one of the remaining four apes was closing with the girl. Peters reached out and spun the creature around. The brute glared at him with surprised eyes and Peters shot his fist into that hairy face.

Bone crunched under his blow and Peters felt a hot wetness on his knuckles. Exultation swept through him at the feel of it, but then suddenly he was grabbed from behind.

He heard a deep growl of triumph from the attacking creature as the hairy arms fastened about him in a grip of

steel. Peters thrashed madly, but then another beast attacked him from the front. The long forearms swept out and fingered paws raked Peters' body. He felt his radi-suit being torn to shreds under those powerful hands.

He tried desperately to break the grasp of the brute holding him from behind. His bands shot up and reached behind him. He found the face of the creature and he dug his fingers into the hairy flesh, tearing and twisting. The brute let out a roar of pain, but the steely grip of the arms encircling Peters did not loosen.

Peters felt his body become nearly naked under the tearing attack of the ape in front of him. Savagely he kicked out with his foot. He caught the ape in the groin and the creature howled in rage, staggering back.

But it was useless. In that brief moment Peters saw the girl struggling in the grasp of another of the brutes. The beast had lifted the girl from the ground and was holding her body in front of him while she kicked desperately.

Peters felt a choking rage and dug his fingers further in the ape's face behind him. For a moment the long clasp- ing arms relaxed under the pain of Peters' attack. Then, as Peters struggled madly from that grip, the beast he had hit in the first assault picked himself from the ground. He dove for Peters, a long hairy arm lashing out.

Peters felt his head rocked back by a terrific blow to his jaw. He felt his knees buckle beneath him and hairy arms clasp him again in a vise of sinewy muscle. Then everything whirled before his eyes and blackness rushed down on him.

PETERS opened his eyes slowly. There was a dull ache in his head, and as awareness came to him he be-

came aware of a soft sobbing sound at his side.

He was lying in what seemed to be a crude oval-shaped hut. The walls on both sides were made of sections of timber with a black muddy substance calked in between the cracks. Ahead was an open doorway, looking out on a flat expanse of ground and other similar huts ranged in a circular pattern around the clearing. In the center of the clearing a large mass of the ape-like creatures milled about.

Then Peters tore his gaze away from the door and looked beside him.

Lorelle lay on the damp ground at his side, her arms lashed behind her, her face tear-streaked.

Peters started to reach out to her but felt his own arms pinioned behind him. He struggled wildly for a moment, trying to break the cords. They felt like tough vines, and as hard as he fought, they held. He lay back finally, his breath heaving.

"I—I'm sorry, Greg . . ."

Lorelle's voice came quietly to Peters and he looked at her. Her eyes were staring at him hopelessly. And Peters felt an agony of frustration inside him. He knew that his life was fast running out, but to be captured like this by brute apes, bound and helpless! And Lorelle beside him. Lorelle. Peters rolled the name over in his mind. It gave him a pang of regret, and deep burning anger.

"You are sorry, Lorelle?" Peters shook his head. "I'm the one who is sorry—and to blame . . ."

The girl's eyes were soft as she looked at him.

"You fought bravely, Greg. . . . No man among my people could have fought as you did. But the Karwa are strong and vicious."

Peters looked questioningly at the girl. "Then these apes are not products

of insane evolution? They are not like the serpents or—Molga?"

Lorelle nodded. "That is so. The Karwa are the only other beings besides my people who evolve naturally. Their land is also not affected by the Great Rays. If it were otherwise we might be safe even now . . ."

Peters' voice was tense as he asked, "What will they do with us?"

The girl turned her eyes away from him.

"We are not the only ones who were captured. The Karwa raided my people this day. They have two men and one woman captive. The men are always killed, and the women . . ."

Her voice trailed off significantly. She had answered his question, and Peters' blood ran cold. Again he fought desperately at his bonds. But it was useless. Peters ceased his struggles as a roar went up from the milling brutes outside the hut.

Peters stared with the girl at the scene outside.

The apes had parted and formed a semi-circular ring. In the center three people were dragged. Two of them were men. The other a woman. Peters knew that these three must be the ones Lorelle had just told him about.

He watched in a weird fascination as the men were thrown violently to the ground and subjected to a brutal beating. The woman screamed in terror, but one of the beasts clapped a hairy paw over her mouth and held her in a cruel grasp until she ceased struggling.

THE two men were lying still on the ground now. Then at a signal from one of the apes, two of the creatures came forward with long pointed poles. They drove them into the ground beside the fallen men, and pounded them in deep with crude wooden mallets.

As Peters watched, a dawning com-

prehension of what was about to take place formed in his mind. And with it came a sense of utter horror.

For now other brutes were dragging the half-conscious men to their feet and lashing them to the stakes. Still others were piling wood and dried foliage at the feet of the men.

And from the rear of the howling beasts, one came running with a fire brand, waving it over his head as he bounded across the clearing.

"My God!" Peters breathed hoarsely, "they're going to burn them alive!"

Beside him, Lorelle was weeping. Her head had turned away from the sight and her soft shoulders were shaking with her sobs.

Peters clenched his teeth and tried to keep his eyes away from the scene out in the clearing. But he couldn't.

He looked back as a piercing scream smote the air.

The firebrand had been applied to the dried wood at the feet of the lashed men. Flames licked up hungrily, and in moments the lower part of their bodies were covered with smoke and fire.

The screams came again. Again. The flames licked higher. And the apemen danced and howled around the stakes.

Peters felt a terrible nausea work at the pit of his stomach. He tore his eyes away from the scene. And then the screaming stopped.

After what seemed like long minutes, Peters glanced at the scene again. The brutes were no longer dancing around the pyres of flame. What had been live breathing men a few minutes before were now only charred, blackened hulks sagging into the embers of the fire.

Peters' eyes turned in revulsion only to see the girl dragged out now, past the stakes, and into the center of the howling apes.

She was thrown roughly to the

ground and then began what seemed like an argument to Peters.

Three of the brutes were grunting and waving their arms in a frenzy. When one of them would point to the prostrate woman and then to himself, the others would pounce up and down in anger.

Finally, as Peters watched in a weird fascination, a larger ape than the rest came forward. The others backed away from him. He stared at the woman for a moment, then at each of the three contesting brutes. Finally one long hairy arm pointed to one of the three. The favored ape bobbed his head excitedly while the other two showed their anger by stomping the ground viciously.

Then the favored one leaped forward and picked the woman from the ground. He swung her roughly across his shoulder and bulked through the milling watchers to disappear.

Peters glanced helplessly at the girl beside him. She was no longer sobbing. Instead, a strange complacency seemed to have possessed her. She was staring at the clearing, and then her eyes turned to Peters.

"... So now you know what is in store for us ..."

PETERS ground his teeth savagely and fought again with his bonds. There had to be a way out! He couldn't allow Lorelle to suffer the same fate he had just witnessed! Peters felt his wrists dampen with his own blood as the tough vines cut into his flesh. But they held.

And then a shadow cut off the light in the doorway of the hut.

Peters stopped his mad thrashing and looked up.

He saw the bestial face of the ape whose face he had clawed when they were captured. The brute stared at Peters with red piggish eyes. His jaw

hung slack in anticipation, and then the brute moved swiftly to them.

Peters was powerless to do anything as the beast dragged him to his feet with one hand, and grabbed the girl with the other.

Then they were shoved through the door of the hut and out into the clearing.

As they reached the center of the milling apes, a hopeless dread swept through Peters. He knew now that it was futile. In a few minutes he would join the two blackened bulks with a third stake. And then Lorelle ... Peters thanked God in that moment that at least he would be dead and not witness what happened to the girl.

But even as thought swept his mind, even as he waited for the kick that would send him to the ground in agony of pain to await the stake, the beast who had pulled them from the hut suddenly pulled the girl forward.

And as Peters watched with horrified eyes, the beast pointed to the girl, and then to himself.

A grim paralysis swept through Peters at that moment. For he knew suddenly that he wasn't going to die first! It was Lorelle who would suffer before his eyes, be carried away and ...

Even as he thought, the drama unfolded before him. He saw the two brutes who had been cheated out of the other girl bound forward and stomp the ground angrily.

But this time no other brute had a chance to step in and decide the victor. The ape who had dragged them from the hut suddenly leaped forward.

A raging howl left his mouth as he smashed into one of the challengers. His huge arms lashed out and crashed into the surprised ape's face. The force of the blows thudded upon Peters' ears, and as he watched, the other ape suddenly fell to the ground, his face a mass

of blood and crushed bone.

In a flash the other challenger attacked. The big ape swung around and met him with a sweeping blow to the head. There was a grunt of pain from the smaller ape, and then as he tried to hack away and scurry into the protecting mass of other brutes standing by howling their delight, the big ape reached out with one of his long forearms and grasped the other by the back of the neck. In a flash he had the challenger bent over backward. Then he lifted the ape off the ground and held him high over his head. A roar of triumph welled from the big ape's throat. Then he crashed the body of his opponent upon the ground.

There was a loud thump and the challenger lay still beside the unconscious form of the other defeated brute.

PETERS watched them, with sick eyes, as the conqueror turned to claim his prize. He saw Lorelle, standing still and straight, her eyes staring straight ahead, as if she were in a daze, her body unquivering.

The beast lumbered toward her, and Peters felt a cry hursting in his throat. But it never left his lips.

The air was suddenly shattered by a distant roar. And following the roar came a series of short, snapping explosions.

The roar came again, rumbling, high-pitched, piercing.

Around him, Peters saw the apes suddenly freeze into immobility. Then Peters saw the girl's eyes turn toward him. A look of astonishment in them. "Molga!" she said.

And then Peters recognized the roar. It was the same sound he had heard when he and Bradley had turned to face the charging dinosaur monster. Bradley!

Again the sharp, snapping explosions.

Again the roars, more infuriated this time.

Of course! Peters recognized those snapping sounds. They were proton explosions! Bradley was somewhere near, facing again one of the monsters.

And bedlam broke loose among the apes. They chattered and howled among themselves, waving their arms in wild gestures.

The brute who had defeated the other two ignored them. He stepped toward the girl and laid a hairy hand on her arm. But even as he did so, the huge ape who appeared to be the leader stepped forward, just as he had in the fight over the first woman. He pointed meaningfully toward the girl and then to himself. Then he grunted defiantly at the other brute and pointed toward the sound of the battle off in the distance.

Two things became apparent to Peters at once. The first that the leader was going to take the girl for himself and the second, that the brute was ordering the tribe toward the battle.

Even as it became clear to Peters, he saw the mass of apes break up and start bounding across the clearing to disappear into the forest.

Soon there were only two apes left. The leader, and the one who had beaten the two challengers.

The leader pointed to Peters and the girl and then to the hut. Then he turned and bounded off into the forest, after the rest of the tribe.

THE remaining ape stared after the leader and stomped his legs angrily against the ground. Peters felt an inward relief. At least they would have a reprieve. The leader had ordered them returned to the hut.

But then the ape stopped stomping. A low grunt came from him and he lumbered forward to the girl. Before

she knew what was happening the brute picked her up and tossed her across his shoulders, then he started to bound across the clearing away from the but—toward the forest!

Peters let a shout well from his lips as he realized what was happening. The ape was rebelling against the leader, was stealing the girl, taking her into the hills with him. And once there—

Peter dashed after the beast, not knowing what he was going to do. His lashed arms made his balance unsteady but he ran faster.

At the sound of Peters coming up behind him, the ape paused and turned. A savage snarl welled from the brute and with his free hand he lashed out a long forearm and caught Peters on the side of the head.

Peters went down with his head spinning, his legs rubbery. He lay upon the ground, trying to get to his feet, and saw the brute disappearing into the woods, the girl screaming now, scream after terrified scream.

Peters stumbled to his feet weakly. He had to get loose, he knew. Any moment the beasts might return and then it would be too late. As the thought flashed through his mind his eyes suddenly fell upon the smoldering fires by the two stakes.

Grimly Peters clenched his teeth and ran to the glowing embers. He shut his eyes from the blackened hulks there and turned his back and knelt to the ground. Then he forced his arms into the fire.

Searing pain knifed through him as the hot coals burned his flesh. An agony of sound rose in his throat but he forced it back. His head spun with the pain but he held his arms in the fire. And then suddenly his arms were free, the vines burned through.

Peters staggered away from the stake

and felt a retching in his stomach. He flexed his burned wrists, and though the effort brought an unbearable pain, they moved.

Then he dashed across the clearing, his bare feet racing over the ground. He had one thought only in his mind. He must reach Lorelle. He *must* reach her!

The forest closed behind him.

PETERS didn't know how long he ran. Time seemed to have stopped for him. The forest was quiet, except somewhere ahead, where he heard a crashing as the ape carrying Lorelle went deeper into the hills.

Peters knew he had covered a great distance already. And as he ran he noticed that the air had a shimmering quality again. That could mean only one thing. He must be passing through a section where the Great Rays acted. And as he passed a quick glance at the shimmering horizon, he saw again the bright shaft of light that came from the pool of the Great Ray.

Then the thought passed from his mind. Peters suddenly stopped in his tracks. Ahead a long grassy plain swept between two hills. And at the far edge of the plain he saw the ape—and Lorelle.

At the same moment Peters saw the brute, the ape saw him. Peters let a cry leap from his throat and he dashed forward onto the plain. Across the plain, the ape threw the girl to the ground and stood waiting, a challenging roar splitting the air.

Peters' feet flew across the ground. He knew it would be a battle to the death, and he also knew that he was no match for the brute strength of the creature.

And then suddenly Peters felt the ground beneath his feet split with a rending noise.

He was thrown violently on his back and something hard shot up beside him, grazing his side in an agony of pain. He felt his legs trapped as if by the coils of some monster serpent, and then as he lay on his back, staring upward, his eyes bulged in shocked amazement.

A giant tree had sprung from the ground and shot upward to tower over his head. The air shimmered around the tree, giving it a distorted sense of unreality. The pressure around his legs grew more intense, and he struggled to an upright position to see gnarled roots twisting from the ground, snaring his legs in a trap of wooden coils.

The horror of his predicament burst fully upon Peters. He had been caught in one of the planet's moments of insane evolution. A giant tree had appeared out of nowhere, from a seed to a wooden mammoth of a tree in a few startling seconds.

Peters' face contorted into a grimace of pain as the roots of the tree brought more pressure on his tortured limbs. He pushed frantically at the roots, but they only became tighter around him.

And then he heard the ape's roar from the opposite side of the clearing. Peters turned his head and saw the brute kick the girl on the ground until she lay still. Then the beast turned toward him and started lumbering across the grass.

Peters knew utter despair in that moment. The pain from the clutching tree roots was unbearable, and coming to finish the agony was the huge brute ape.

"Gregory Peters! Have you forgotten so soon? Thought, Peters, thought can save you—only thought controls the Great Ray!"

A powerful voice thundered in Gregory Peters' mind. He sat transfixed, staring with vacant eyes into the shimmering air. Again came the voice, and this time Peters knew that he had heard

it before. It was—

"You must live, Peters! I cannot help you, I can only guide you. You must prevent Bradley from reaching the pool of the Great Ray. The destiny of all men is in your hands. Think, Peters, think!"

IT WAS Wilson's voice! Peters would have known that voice anywhere! It was Wilson speaking into his mind—speaking from some dis-embodied void. And then Peters knew what Wilson had meant. His mind cleared in a flash. Of course! He had seen Lorelle do it with the serpents!

Awareness came to him as a loud roar of triumph welled close to where he sat trapped in the roots of the giant tree. Peters turned his head and saw the ape bearing down upon him in slow lumbering bounds. In moments—

Peters turned his eyes to the tree and thought grimly, fiercely: *This tree has never evolved . . . it is but a seed in the ground . . . it doesn't exist! It doesn't exist!*

And before Peters' startled eyes, the tree vanished.

He was sitting on the ground, stunned and shaken, and the tree was no longer there.

Peters lurched to his feet and felt the blood pour back into his tortured limbs. He stared at the ape, weaving in shocked surprise on its feet, a sudden light of fear in its piggish eyes.

But then the fear vanished from the brute and it started toward Peters again.

Peters knew he was in no condition to fight the brute. He wouldn't last a minute once those long arms closed around him. And then the thought struck him. If he could make the tree vanish—could he not also make *other* things appear?

He thought desperately. He thought

of one of the giant serpents he and Lorelle had faced. He *willed* it into existence.

And as the ape rushed at him, not fifty feet away now, there was a sudden shimmer in the air beside the beast, and then the giant serpent appeared.

Peters staggered back in awe at the sight of this creation. But as he stared in awe, the ape stopped to stare in sudden fear. The serpent rose on mighty coils not three feet from the ape, its fanged head hissing madly.

Then the serpent struck, its head lashing at the ape, its coils wrapping around the beast's legs. The ape let out a roar of pain and anger and its long hairy arms reached out to grasp the fanged head in a grip of steel.

That was all Peters waited to see. Turning, he dashed as fast as he could across the plain and knelt beside Lorelle's still figure. He slapped her face gently.

"Lorelle!"

The girl stirred and opened her eyes. For a moment a glazed fear crossed them. Then sudden overwhelming relief.

"Greg! Oh, Greg—it is you!"

Peters nodded grimly and helped her to her feet. Then she heard the noise of the battle behind them and stared in disbelief at what she saw.

"The serpent! But how did it get here—"

"We don't have time to talk," Peters interrupted her. "I pulled the same trick I saw you do—only in reverse. Now let's get out of here while we have a chance!"

The girl turned away from the death throes behind them and pointed to the hills ahead.

"My people—we must get to them. We will be safe. Come!"

She took Peters' hand and they sped into the hills.

"I AM Parno, father of Lorelle. My deepest gratitude to you for saving her life. My home and everything I have is yours to command, as are my people."

Peters felt a flush of embarrassment as the white-haired man gripped his hand warmly.

They had arrived not more than a half hour back. In that time Peters had waited to meet Lorelle's father, and had examined the small city resting deep in the hills.

It was constructed mainly of low, single-floored dwellings. The buildings were made of cut stone, and though they were somewhat crude in appearance, they had most of the characteristics of early twentieth century dwellings on Earth.

The city was not large, nor was the population. Peters doubted if there were more than a thousand inhabitants. He had toured it with Lorelle, while she pointed with pride to her people's accomplishments. Peters had only nodded to her enthusiasm. He knew he couldn't have told her that on Earth they would have been considered primitives, except for their structures. He saw that the men carried knives and sword-like weapons, and Lorelle proudly pointed to them and compared them with the Karwa. Peters had grinned at that and nodded agreement.

Now he had met her father. The old man was still shaking his hand in a warm clasp of friendship.

"I have been wanting to meet you, Parno," Peters said. "And I thank you for the kindness you are showing me. As to Lorelle, I would gladly have given my life for her—she saved mine twice before we were captured by the Karwa."

Peters knew he would have gladly given his life without adding the last, and from the way the old man suddenly

smiled at him, he felt that Parno must have read it on his face.

The old man nodded gravely. "I know you are a stranger from another world, and from the way you came, like your great Weelsun, I know that your people have science far superior to ours. I know that your ship has crashed, and that you may want to leave us. But I want you to feel that while you are here on our world, this," he pointed to the city, "is your home."

AT THE old man's words Peters felt suddenly ill at ease again. He remembered the mission he was on. He remembered the rocket ship that lay waiting for him somewhere out in the dread Valley of the Veil. And he remembered Bradley. Was the man dead? If the monster, Molga, had not killed him, how could he possibly have escaped the mass of Karwa? But then he remembered the voice of Wilson. Wilson would have known if Bradley were dead. But Wilson had only warned him that Bradley must be prevented from reaching the pool of the Great Ray. That could mean only one thing. Wilson knew that the scientist was still alive, and even now he might be nearing the powerful energy source. Peters suddenly knew then what he had to do.

"Parno," Peters said abruptly, "the being you call Wilson has told you of my coming and the coming of another Earthman, Bradley."

The old man nodded slowly. "That is true. And he also said that you would be in danger. So Lorelle was sent to help you."

A frown crossed Peters' face at that. He glanced at the girl, standing beside her father. Her eyes lighted up suddenly and she laughed.

"You are wondering, Greg, why it was that I, a girl, was sent to do a man's work?"

Peters flushed. "I didn't mean that, hut—"

She continued. "It is because of the Evolved Ones. Only the first offspring of our leaders has the gift of thought control of the Great Ray. Parno, my father, has that gift, and I, as his only child, have also been favored by the Evolved Ones. So it was I who had to go to your aid in the Valley of the Veil. It was Weelsun who told me . . ."

Peters felt further questions rise in his mind about that, hut he didn't ask them. It was apparent to him that the Evolved Ones were something of a religion to these people, and the strange gift of thought control was considered a great deference bestowed upon them. He accepted the girl's words and then faced Parno again.

"I too have received a message from Wilson," he said, and saw a light of respect widen the old man's eyes. "Wilson told me that I must prevent the other Earthman from reaching the pool of the Great Ray. You see, the man who came here with me has evil plans. He hopes to control the Great Ray and use it as a weapon against the people of my own world, and eventually, against the entire universe."

A look of horror spread over Parno's face. "That is indeed a great evil," he said gravely. "But the Evolved Ones will not let him steal the Great Ray."

Peters shook his head. "I'm afraid the Evolved Ones cannot stop him. They are only thought entities—they have no control over physical beings. Their power is confined to direct influences of the Great Ray. Wilson told me as much. No, it is up to me to stop him, I—"

PETERS' words broke off in mid-sentence. There was a commotion from the far end of the city, and as they turned to see what was happen-

ing they saw one of the young men dashing toward them.

By the time he reached them they could see he was covered with sweat, and that he could barely stand on his feet. Peters knew he must have run a long distance.

"Parno!" the youth gasped out. "I was in the hills—I saw a band of the Karwa—and with them was one of the strangers—he was leading them—he had a weapon that shoots bolts of fire—the Karwa think he is one of the Evolved Ones—they follow him . . ."

The words were uttered in choppy, almost meaningless, phrases. Peters stepped forward and gripped the youth's arm.

"You say you saw Bradley leading a group of the Karwa? Leading them where?"

The youth pointed toward the hills where the bright shaft of radiance shot into the sky to be absorbed by the blackness encircling the planet.

"They were going toward the pool of the Great Ray!" the youth exclaimed.

Peters turned abruptly away from the youth. In his eyes there was a fire of determination. He looked at Parno.

"Parno, before you said I could command you and your people. Does that still stand?"

The old man nodded. "Ask us anything. We will do our best."

"Then, Parno, I will ask you to give me some of your men. I must get to the great pool ahead of Bradley and the Karwa. I must destroy this man from my own planet. But because he has the Karwa with him I will need your help."

Parno turned without answering and began giving orders. At once dozens of strong youths stepped forward, their sword arms flashing, eagerness in their eyes.

Peters felt a soft touch on his arm. He looked beside him and found Lorelle staring at him wistfully.

"Greg, I will go with you."

Peters shook his head. "No, Lorelle, it is too dangerous. There will be fighting, and—"

"I will go with you," the girl insisted. "If you must fight then I will fight beside you. And besides, you forget that I am favored by the Evolved Ones. I may be able to help in my own way."

Peters ignored the last part. He suddenly knew that he wanted Lorelle with him. He wanted her with him every minute of his life. . . . Every minute that remained.

"All right, Lorelle, you will come with me."

PETERS halted the troop of armed youths. They were rounding the last turn in the hills, and around that turn, Peters knew, lay the pool of the Great Ray. Lorelle had led the way, with Peters walking swiftly beside her. Now, as they reached their destination, Peters felt a quiver of tension. If Bradley had reached it ahead of them . . .

They moved forward as Peters gave the signal and they rounded an outcropping of rock.

And Peters stopped, frozen in awe at what he saw.

They were entering a great circular bowl in the hills. Steep walls rose on two sides, towering upward. But it wasn't the walls that held Peters in gaping awe.

The bottom of the bowl was a fiery pool of bubbling rock. It was as if the rock itself were liquid, and yet Peters knew that it wasn't liquid in the sense that he or any Earthman would have known it. And shooting up from the pool was a brilliant shaft of iridescence. A giant ray that shot into the sky with a brilliance that was dazzling.

As he stood there, the rays seemed to seep into him, and he could feel the nerves of his body tingle.

And then he was aroused from his stupor by Lorelle grasping his arm frantically.

"Greg! Look—coming in the far end—it is the Karwa and the Earthman!"

Peters followed the girl's pointing finger. Then he saw them. A horde of apes, the Karwa, following behind Bradley!

Peters let out a shout and ran forward. On all sides of him the warriors of Parno surged ahead, their sword arms flashing.

At the same moment Bradley and the Karwa saw them. Peters saw Bradley pointing to them and then the Karwa surged forward, bounding over the bowl, roars of battle tearing the air.

Then Peters saw Bradley lift the proton gun and as he saw the movement, Peters grabbed the girl's arm and flung her to the ground. As he fell beside her he heard the sharp spitting of the weapon and felt the explosive charges snap over their heads. He heard one of Parno's men scream in agony and fall, a hole burned through his chest where the charge had struck. Then the firing ceased.

Peters glanced ahead and saw the men of Parno closing in close combat with the Karwa. He also saw Bradley working frantically with his weapons, but they refused to fire. Peters knew then that the charges were expended. Bradley would no longer have that advantage!

Peters got swiftly to his feet and charged toward the scientist. The battle between the Karwa and Parno's men had edged backward, the swift sword arms of the warriors driving the apes back further and further. And then, even as he watched he saw the

apes break into a running retreat, with Parno's men hard at their rear.

THEN all Peters could see was Bradley's face. The scientist had a look of rage and frustration. He started to meet Peters' attack, and then suddenly his features changed and a determined look sprang into them.

He turned and ran for the edge of the pool.

Behind Peters, the girl cried out.

"Greg! Do not enter the pool! Greg! Come back."

And Peters saw in that moment that it was Bradley's intention to hurl himself into the pool of energy! Bradley knew he was beaten, that he would never leave the planet alive!

Peters halted as Bradley stopped by the edge of the radiant mass. The scientist turned triumphant features toward Peters.

"I win after all, Peters! You may have prevented me from carrying out my original plan—but I'll become immortal—like Wilson!"

And Peters knew he could never reach Bradley in time to stop him.

A loud laughter came from Bradley's lips and he started to turn back to the pool.

But he stopped.

The air suddenly shimmered beside him and a face appeared, suspended in the air. Peters gasped as he recognized that face. It was Wilson.

And Bradley had seen it too.

"Wilson!" Bradley's voice cracked out in sudden fear.

"Yes, Bradley, it is I who trusted you, it is Wilson who told you of the power of this world. You are an evil man, Bradley, I know that now. But you will never take the secret of the Great Ray from here!"

Bradley's voice laughed mockingly. "Maybe I will never take it from here,

Wilson, but I can become free thought—just as you did! I'll take my power that way!"

"That I will welcome, Bradley," Wilson's voice said.

"We'll see!" Bradley shouted and turning, threw himself into the pool.

Peters gazed awe-struck as he saw Bradley's body enveloped in the searing brilliance of the great ray shaft. The body of the scientist seemed to explode with iridescence, and then vanished.

Almost at once the face of Wilson shimmered at the edge of the pool. A great ray of explosive force shot from the spot where Wilson's image floated in the air—shot straight into the great shaft of radiance, straight to the spot where Bradley's figure had vanished.

There was a single shriek of agony from within the pool. Then silence.

The face of Wilson turned in the air at the edge of the pool and a smile appeared on it.

Peters, staring at the face of the disembodied Earthman, felt a hand creep into his. Lorelle had moved up beside him, her eyes wide with reverent awe as she stared at the Evolved One.

"Bradley has gone, Peters," the voice of Wilson said. "Only when the vital forces of his ego were released from his body could I use the powers at my command. I have shattered those forces, and Bradley has ceased to exist. Thus the menace facing others of our kind is removed."

Peters nodded slowly, his mind staggered by what he saw and what he was hearing. "But what about the Council on Earth? I was sent here to find out about the black spot circling this world. If they don't hear from me . . ."

"I will take care of that, Peters. I will see that the minds of the Council understand. But what about you, Peters? What do *you* want that may be in our power to grant?"

PETERS had almost forgotten. But now he remembered. He remembered all too well what his destiny was. And as he remembered a sadness gripped his heart. What did he want? He wanted to live. He wanted to live more than anything in creation. For the first time in his life Peters knew he had something to live for. The girl at his side . . .

The voice of Wilson broke in.

"You are thinking of the radiation disease that is eating your life away. Are you not, Peters?"

Peters nodded.

"That has ended, Peters. This planet has many strange properties as you have noticed, but there are good things about the Great Ray. And one thing it does is kill all disease. Your body is filled with its protective powers at this moment. You will not die, Peters. . . . And yet, I offer you a choice."

Peters stared at the shimmering face. "A choice?"

"Yes. I offer you the choice of joining me and the *others*. The Universe is limitless and there is much to do—many things to see. You may join *us* if you wish."

Beside Peters, Lorelle gripped his hand tightly.

"Greg! Please do not leave! I—I could not bear it . . ."

Peters looked into the girl's eyes a moment and then turned back to the shimmering image of Wilson.

"Any thanks for what you have told me just now would seem mighty futile . . . but if I may do as I wish I will stay here . . . with Lorelle . . . This is a crazy planet to pick for a home—but I'd like to try and make it a sane world to live in!"

The shimmering image had a smile on its face. "Very well, Peters. But we will meet again—sometime . . ."

The image faded and was gone.

And Peters held Lorelle close . . .



I held the rabbit while the professor jabbed a needle into it

The IMMORTAL MENACE

By CRAIG BROWNING

Lefty Baker might have preferred to remain in the insane asylum if he had known what it would mean for rabbits to be deathless!

LEFTY BAKER," I said to myself solemnly. "Never again. Never again."

I stood beside the car that took me to the nut house and looked across the campus at all the buildings with bars on the windows and realized that in the eyes of society I was legally non campus mentis, which means something else besides needing a haircut.

I had got mixed up with one of the long-haired boys—fooled because he had a haircut; hut I knew how to recognize them now. Nevermore, as my kid brother who went to high school would say, would I associate with a guy who had an exteroceptor deceptor.

I had hopes of eventually convincing the doctors that I was as sane as they were, as things stood. But I realized they would be prejudiced, and jump on anything that looked crazy to them. I knew it would be no use to try to convince them there HAD been an exteroceptor deceptor and I was sane. I'd made up my mind cheerfully to agree that I was nuts, and willingly to take any cure they dished out to me, so long as it promised to get me out of the place quick.

Well, with the sight of all them bars on windows I thought they would shove me in a padded cell and maybe forget about me. Instead, I was led into an office where a nice duck the same age as me greeted me with a smile just like I

was a customer who could walk out on him if he didn't.

The driver that brought me down to the place from the city hospital laid an envelope on the doc's desk and handed an order hook of some kind to the doc.

He looked it over.

"Lefty Baker," he said, looking up at me. "Of course you have a first name. Lefty is just a nickname."

"They called me Lefty ever since I was a kid," I says politely. "I was christened Gregory, but if you call Gregory I might not know you're meaning me, so better keep it Lefty."

"I'm Doctor Walters," the doc says. "You'll be in my ward for the first three weeks."

He scribbled his name on the order book and handed it back to the driver, who pulled out a yellow slip and gave it to the doc, then stuck the order hook in his pocket and left.

I thought of sticking my thumbs in my ears and saying, "Woo woo. I'm a sack of potatoes." But I knew the doc would take me seriously and probably ask me how I had guessed it, so I grinned to myself and kept quiet.

"So you are a sack of potatoes," the doc said calmly.

"Huh?" I asked with a sinking feeling. I thought he must be a mind reader, or maybe I really was nuts and had said it out loud without realizing it.

"Don't be alarmed," the doc said,

grinning at me. "After all, I see a dozen patients a week look at the driver like you did, and some of them can't resist. They say it out loud. It isn't abnormal. It's a natural reaction."

"Oh," I said with relief.

The doc presses a buzzer on his desk and a big husky guy comes in. He's wearing white trousers and coat made of sheet cloth.

"Put him in five," Doc Walters says to this guy. "Lefty Baker, this is Jerry Woods. He's your male nurse for the next three weeks. Be sure you behave yourself, because he is a nice fellow and it makes him feel badly to have to put the patients in strait-jackets."

"Sure, doc. Anything you say," I says, feeling sort of funny in the pit of my stomach.

JERRY takes me by the arm and leads me through a door. We go into a big hall covered with linoleum. A couple of old men in lightweight coveralls are pushing wide polisbers up and down the hall. Everything is quiet and subdued like in a public library.

We walk past a dozen or so doors, all wide open. This is a great surprise to me because I thought all crazy people were kept in padded cells to keep them from bumping their heads against the walls and ruining the plaster.

The male nurse turns in at a door with an aluminum 5 over it. There's two cots in this room. Jerry the nurse points to one.

"That's yours. Be sure you keep it made up." Then he points to the other cot.

"That's Doc Winters," he says. "He's your roommate."

Doc Winters is a tall skinny guy with a bulging head and store teeth that seem ready to pop out when he smiles. His eyes are pale blue and moist all the time. He stands up and comes over to

shake my hand, and I see he's over six feet, but so thin he can't weigh over a hundred and forty. In fact, he walks like he might buckle any minute.

"How do you do," he says politely, taking one of my hands in his bony one.

"Hello, doc," I says very friendly like.

"I'll leave you two now," Jerry says, and walks out.

Doc Winters stands looking down at me from his incredible height, apparently forgetting he has hold of my hand.

"Strange," he mutters.

"What's strange?" I ask, trying to get my hand free without his noticing it.

"It seems," he says, frowning a little like he's thinking, "that—well, I have a strange feeling that Destiny has sent you to me."

"Oh," I says, remembering where I am.

"Tell me," he says, still hanging onto my hand with a limp but unbreakable grip. "Have you ever had a feeling that there was Something you were here for?"

"Sure," I says, deciding to humor him. "I'm here because I'm crazy. But I have the utmost confidence Doc Walters can cure me and once more turn me loose as a useful member of society." (I didn't see any harm in turning on the propaganda. No telling what he might repeat in the right places.)

"That isn't what I mean," Winters said. "I mean—Destiny."

"Destiny?" I echo. "Come again."

"Destiny," Doc Winters says, "is something you have to do, and no matter what you do to try to get out of it, you always wind up by doing it anyway. You can't help yourself."

"What's that got to do with me?" I ask.

"Us, you mean," he says. "It means that I was sent here to this institution,

and you were sent here, so that we would meet and perform some valuable work together that would help save mankind."

"Oh," I says with a sinking feeling.

RIGHT at this time I'm beginning to recognize the signs. I look around for some way to escape. Of course there aren't any, because they couldn't afford to have all the nuts in the place escaping all the time, and had no doubt covered up all the ratholes long ago. Anyway Doc Winters still has my hand.

"Now let's see," he says, tapping his forehead with a long bony finger of his free hand. "What can it be? Yes. That must be it. No, it can't be. That would be too much to hope for."

He drops my hand, to my great relief, and paces up and down slowly, the joints in his knees creaking like he was a robot that needed oiling. Finally he stops abruptly, a look of decision on his face.

"Yes," he says. "That must be it. It all adds up. There's no getting around it. It's—Destiny."

"What is?" I ask, kicking myself for biting like a sucker.

"Sitting here in solitude," he nods at his surroundings with an air of lofty disdain, "I have evolved a formula for—IMMORTALITY." He whispers the word loudly and glances around to see if anybody has their nose stuck through the doorway.

"Until now I wasn't sure it was correct," he adds. "But the Fate that brought us together would be meaningless if that formula were not correct. Therefore it is. Get it?"

"You mean you have some kind of patent medicine that will make me live forever?" I ask.

"Precisely," the doc comes back. "Precisely," he adds reverently. "I

hasten to add that I am one of the world's great scientists. I am not here, as you may have imagined because I am insane. I have had merely a slight nervous breakdown, due to overwork in my scientific laboratory. Shortly I will be released, and return to my work, and then I will prepare the formula and inject it into rabbits. When they have lived far beyond their normal lifespan the world of science will be forced to admit that I have solved the mystery of—Death!"

"Gee, that's fine, doc," I encourages him. "But I'll hate to lose you as a roommate. I guess that can't be helped though." I gives an exaggerated sigh to make him feel good.

"Oh, but you won't lose me," he says quickly. "Destiny did not bring about our meeting only to have us pass as ships on the sea at night. You are coming WITH me."

"How?" I ask, interested.

"You'll see," he says knowingly, and that's all I get out of him. The rest of the day he ignores me except for giving me a knowing look once in a while.

WELL, two days pass monotonously. I find that things aren't so bad, so I pitch in and help polish the floors, get acquainted with the other inmates, and greet the male nurses very friendly like whenever they are looking my way. The thing I miss most is the cigarets. They let me have one after each meal, with a male nurse lighting it for me because they're afraid I'll set fire to the place or something if I light the match myself.

There's a reading room up near the doc's office door. On the afternoon of the third day I'm there I'm sitting in a wicker chair reading a magazine in this reading room. I'm concealed by a big drape hanging in the doorway.

Jerry and Doc Walters stop not five

feet from me and start talking. I guess they don't know I'm around, because they start talking about me.

"What's your opinion of Lefty, Jerry?" the doc asks.

"Dangerous," Jerry says. This makes me almost jump out of my chair. I listen for more.

"I've met the type before," Jerry says in a low voice. "If you didn't know that the board of psychiatrists declared him insane you would swear he was the nicest, sanest guy you ever saw. But give them a knife and they'll slit everybody's throat and laugh while they're doing it."

"I'm a little inclined to agree with you," Doc Walters said. "Those shifty eyes, all that artificial cheery friendliness he puts on—it's not normal. At any rate, I couldn't think of setting him free at the end of the three-week period and take the responsibility. The criminally insane can keep a grip on themselves for three weeks under pressure. We'll put him in one of the other wards and see what happens. In six months or a year he'll lose control. Then we can form an opinion on him."

They stopped talking. I heard them walk away. Three days of grinning like a dummy, being nice to everybody, going without cigarets and beer without griping, and all the hopes that had kept me going come up and slap me in the face like a wet towel.

I keep sitting there and pretending to read because I know that if I get up I will hunt up the doc and the nurse and kill them. But I'm thinking. Already I've learned a lot about the nut house. Here you either keep your mouth shut and take everything that's handed you or you're abnormal. You even have to be careful what you think about.

An Englishman would never get out of a place like this. He would keep seeing the points of jokes he had heard

months before and grinning, and the male nurses would shake their heads behind his back and get the strait-jacket ready.

JUST this morning a guy starts yelling, "Let me outa here!" About ten male nurses bear down on him and in ten seconds he's on his way out, all right; wearing a strait-jacket and headed for that hell mentioned only in whispers—the back wards.

There's a guy here who's been in the nut house before. He's been telling me all about it. In the back wards they put you in a strait-jacket and strap you into a chair. You stay there. Twice a day they come around and feed you, and if you don't grab onto every bite that's stuck into your mouth they force it down your throat. Once a day they take you for what they call a hydrotherapy treatment.

In a hydrotherapy treatment they stick you in a tub and cover it with canvas that has a hole big enough for your head to stick out.

Then they fill the tub with scalding hot water till it comes up even with the canvas cover. For two hours they keep you in it, with the water getting hotter and hotter. When they take you out you're so weak they have to carry you. Back you go to the strait-jacket and the chair.

I know that I've got to keep on grinning and acting just like I have for the past three days, or I'll get slammed into the back ward. But it looks like I'm going to have stay here for six months or a year, or maybe for life.

The doc is a stickler for curing people. I see that now. If nothing's wrong with you he can't cure you, and if he can't cure you he can't set you loose. I might have expected that a doc in a nut house would be a little nuts himself.

All of a sudden I remember Doc

Winters. He's a smart duck. I decide to tell him about it and see what he has to say.

I find him sitting on his cot just like he always does, with his mind a million miles away. It takes five minutes to bring him to, and then in a low voice I tell him what I heard.

"Hmm," he says. "That encourages me." He says it just like a regular doc who is about to cure you of the measles. After awhile he adds, "That raises a question."

"What kind of a question, Doctor Winters?" I ask hopefully.

"I had assumed that I would be released soon, and you also," he says slowly. "Perhaps I have been mistaken. Yes, I can see it now. Dr. Walters has probably mistaken my introspection for introversion."

"Come again?" I says.

"I mean," the doc says, "that Dr. Walters has undoubtedly assumed that my deep thought on the problems of the universe has been brooding on myself. If I were to take him into my confidence he would be convinced I am crazy."

"Oh," I says. "Then we're both in the same boat. What're we gonna do?"

"The process of developing a recognized form of mania and responding to a cure is the only sure way of either of us being released," he says thoughtfully. "In my case I could do that. In your case, I doubt it. You haven't enough knowledge of abnormal psychology."

"You mean I'm stuck here?" I asked, alarmed. He nods his head gravely.

"Yes," he says solemnly. "I'm afraid so, unless—"

"Unless what?" I ask quickly.

HE DOESN'T answer. Instead, he gets up and paces the floor, his long bony legs tottering under the

load of his body and threatening to bend and break with every step.

"Since it is ordained, the Way must also be ordained," he says finally. "Yes, that must be it. I must concentrate on discovering the Way."

Well, I can gather vaguely what he's thinking about. Escape!

"Hm-mm," I says firmly. "Don't fool yourself that there is one way of getting out of here they haven't seen and plugged water tight."

"I doubt if they have made this place escape proof," the doc says confidently. "Don't forget, those who tried it before had only ordinary minds."

The way he says it sounds like he already has some ideas on the subject. I try to draw him out, but all he will say is, "In another week I should know whether I am to be released or not. If I am, then I'll tell you what to do. If not, we will escape together."

A FEW more days pass. I do a lot of talking with Doc Winters, my roommate. He tells me more about this immortality thing.

"Old age," he says to me, "is really a problem in mechanics rather than chemistry. All the time there are films of stuff forming inside the blood vessels. The bones are accumulating calcium and setting like concrete. Pretty soon all this accumulation of stuff keeps food from the cells and they grow weak from starvation.

"This takes place in the growing child, too," he says. "But in a blood vessel in a growing child the blood vessel keeps getting bigger. The film pulls loose from the walls of the vein. So the idea is to keep the body growing slowly."

He's quite frank about this, but a little reluctant to let me in on the big secret of how he expects to do it. Finally he tells me.

"It wouldn't be possible," he says, "to make the body immortal by simple injections of growth chemicals. Such injections would create a continual state of upset that would defeat its own ends. However, there are three different mold germs that together provide the necessary chemicals, which can live in the environment of the blood stream. Infestation of the stream with these three types of spores would result in one of two things. First, they might so upset the basal metabolism as to cause death. Two, they might arrive at a state of metabolic harmony similar to that of many disease germs in the body. Then their waste products would provide a continual supply of the growth chemicals necessary to immortality, regulated by the state of the body itself. Moreover, since they would to all intents and purposes be a disease, the offspring would become infected, and immortality would be transferred from parent to offspring by contamination."

This sounds sensible. He won't tell me what molds he has in mind, though. I guess he's afraid I'll escape and do the thing by myself, and steal the glory from him.

"Suppose you *do* this," I says, "and the stuff doesn't work like you think. If it kills the guy you experiment on it'll be called murder, won't it?"

"Oh, I won't try it on a human," the doc replies. "I plan to experiment on rabbits first."

"Oh," I says.

WELL, as Doc Winters says later himself, it was inevitable that Doc Walters, the medico in charge of the ward we are in, would decide against turning him loose. He sat on the edge of his cot and stared off into space too much. You could send a perfectly SANE guy to the nut house, and if he made a noise with his lips absentmind-

edly, Doc Walters would think it was a symptom of insanity. He's more afraid of turning loose a harmless nut than he is of committing a sane duck to the back wards and the sadistic keepers who wanted the job in the first place because it is the only job you can get where you can torture helpless people and not only get away with it, but actually get paid for it.

The doc, as I got in the habit of calling Doc Winters, my roommate, came back from his interview with Doc Walters so dejected that his gangly frame was bent over nearly doubled. Up to this time he had thought Doc Walters on the up and up. Now his opinion changes. He confides in me that he has become convinced Doc Walters doesn't know a thing about insanity and has a bee in his bonnet that everybody's crazy, and fair game for the nut house.

The doc feels sorry for himself for a couple hours, then gets down to business. He shows me how the all-metal window frames are screwed into another frame set in the bricks, and how the whole unit can be lifted out after taking out fourteen screws. He also shows me how I can take out one of the casters on my cot and pry the wheel out of it and use it for a screwdriver to take out the screws.

I work on it while he watches at the door to see that no one comes by. In here you have to watch out for the inmates as well as the male nurses, because most of them ARE nuts, and you can't tell which one might squeal on you, or insist on going with you.

During the afternoon I work out all the screws. The window including the bars is held in now just by the paint in the cracks, and I know I can get it loose easy.

From nine o'clock until midnight there's only one nurse in the ward, and

he's generally too lazy to look in unless a patient is making some noise. So at a quarter after nine I close the door to our room part way, as usual, and then lift out the window.

We're on the first floor, so it's only about a six foot drop to the flower beds outside. There's no telling when somebody might pass by and see the window and bars out, so we slip along in the shadows until we reach the gate to the campus.

A few people are waiting there for the bus to town. It comes along in a few minutes and they get on. When the bus is starting up the doc and I slip out and get onto the two spare tires on the back. We ride like that for a couple of miles until the bus stops at the arterial to the state highway. Then we drop off.

We're a little worried about our faded blue coveralls. They look too much like state property. The railroad tracks run close to the highway, so we duck down by the tracks and wait.

ABOUT an hour later a freight train comes along, going slow. We hop into an empty box car. And when it gets light in the morning we look out and see the highway still running alongside the tracks, and pretty soon we see a sign on the highway that tells us we are crossing the state line.

The doc seems overjoyed at this. He says that when you are crazy it seems you are crazy in only one state. When you get out of the state you are sane unless you go back into that state again. I think this is screwy, but he talks like he knows all about it, and later I find out he's right.

Anyway, it seems to work with him. Already he is acting more sane by the minute. Since I wasn't crazy in the first place I don't feel no different, of course.

The doc says he has a summer place in the woods near here that he used to go to when his wife was still alive, and that we can hole up there while he performs his experiment. In fact, when we hop off the freight we are only a couple of blocks from his cabin, and when we get there I look back and still see the tracks!

It's a nice place made out of imitation logs. Well built. There's a creek in front of the place, and down a short hill is a dirt road that is only a couple of miles from the nearest town.

The doc remembers he has a bank account at that town. He finds some clothes he forgot in a closet, and there's a jacket that'll fit me okay. In an hour after we get there we start hiking into town.

Some farmer gives us a lift. He knows the doc, but hadn't heard about him being put in the nut house.

In town the doc and me casually walk into the local bank. The doc writes out a check for two hundred dollars. The cashier smiles at him and says long time no see, and calmly disbes out two Cs.

After that we hunt up a greasy spoon. While I'm eating I think things over and decide I'd better stick with the doc a while. Not only does he have plenty of money, but there's a nice hide-out.

He's all for getting started on the big experiment. After we eat he goes to the local druggist and gets some things. It seems that even the druggist knows him and gives him anything he wants without a prescription.

Then we hunt up the farmer that gave us a lift, and talk him into going around with us while we load up his car with groceries, chicken wire, and other stuff.

The last thing we get is a couple of dozen rabbits cooped up in a box. Then

we head back for the cabin.

THE next few days I do more work than I'd seen since I left home when I was seventeen. But I kind of liked the doc.

Between us we get a lot of rabbit hutches made. Then he starts experimenting with things. Finally he comes up with a bottle of something that looks like just plain water.

He handles it like it was a bottle full of diamonds. The first day he shoots some of it into just one rabbit. The next morning the rabbit is still okay, so he gives a few more a shot of the stuff. He has a card over the door to each hutch, and marks on the card how much of the stuff he gives each rabbit.

Half of the rabbits he leaves alone. I ask him why, and he says that they are the test group. That seems silly to me. After all, what's the use of feeding them if you don't do something with them? But he mutters something about it not being scientific, so I drop it.

After a few days I begin to see what he means by test group. Every time we feed the bunnies the doc weighs out the food I give each one. After they eat all they want I take it out and he weighs it again. That way he knows how much each one eats.

Right away the ones with the shot from the hypo start eating more than the others, and I see that if he didn't have the others to check by he wouldn't be able to tell whether the others were eating more or not.

He says the reason they eat more is because the mold germs use up some of the food, and that sounds reasonable.

By now I've forgotten about my resolve to stay away from the long-haired boys and their rackets. I can't see how this can possibly land me behind the eightball anyway. All I'm doing is

raising rabbits for the doc. So long as I keep out of the state they can't lock me up again.

The doc is a nice guy. He buys me plenty of cigarettes and even a few cases of beer. Then he writes another check when we go into town one day, and gives me a hundred bucks for spending money.

Of course, I miss the card games, but I buy a deck and spend hours practicing up on all the tricks I know, until I can make the cards obey me like they used to. I'm even thinking about looking up the local den of evil and taking the yokels for all they can stand. It's only a couple of miles to town, and I give the town a gander and notice that the rear end of the shoe shop seems very interesting to the local boys after the sun goes down.

The doc has introduced me around as Dr. Baker, a fellow scientist. The way news travels in a small town I know that even babes in arms now know me by sight and consider me a push-over. That makes it a sweet setup. I can take the local boys two or three times running on "beginner's luck" without them tumbling. That should net me enough profit to get back to the city any time I get tired of the place.

IT'S on a Thursday after I'd been around for two weeks that I tell the doc after supper that I think I'll mosey into town and take in a show.

He says he doesn't want to go, as I knew he would, so I walk into town.

When I get there I go into the shoe shop and have new heels put on my shoes. Sure enough, the shoemaker asks me if I wouldn't like a little relaxation while he fixes them. I says "Sure!" so he swings open a shelf full of shoe boxes mysteriously, like a spy opening the iron curtain to Russia, and I find myself in the back room.

I sling a few six cylinder words around and have them explain the game of poker to me, and while two or three yokels practically play my hand for me I have a run of what they think is he-ginner's luck.

About two o'clock in the morning I get very sleepy and tell them I have to get up early because of a scientific experiment the doc and I are conducting.

The guy running the joint has to wake up the shoemaker to borrow enough money to pay me off. I can't even believe it myself! I walk out with three hundred and forty hucks and an invitation to drop in the next night, which I accept.

Then I walk back to the cahin on the dirt road. I'm beginning to get homesick for the city. I don't like the crickets chirping and the frogs croaking. I would rather get a glass of heer at Oscar's with Pokey, and be in my own neck of the woods than drink heer out of a hottle while I park my heels on a log railing and watch the creek flow by. The peacefulness of the country gets you.

I take my time, and it's three o'clock when I get near the cahin. I see the lights are on. That surprises me, as I know the doc is a heavy sleeper.

Instead walking across the field between the road and the cahin I decide to take a trail I know about that leads to the cahin through the woods. It comes out by the rahbit pens.

I walk very quietly, in case it is the cops catching up with me and planning on taking me back to the nut house.

When I get to the rahbit pens I stop. Every one of them is tipped over and broken up like it had been in a wreck. The rahbits are all gone.

I peek in the window and see the doc pacing up and down, pulling his hair, with an awful look on his face. Nohody else is there, so I rush around and go in.

"There you are, Lefty," the doc says. "Something terrible has happened! Some dogs tore the rahbit hutches to pieces, and most of the rahbits got away!"

"Calm yourself, doc," I says easily. "That's not too bad. You can always get more rahbits and start over. After all, you know you're on the right track."

"You don't understand!" the doc says, wringing his hands so that his hony fingers crackle. "These are RABBITS."

"So what?" I says. "Rahbits are a dime a dozen. You're just a week or two behind schedule, that's all. You can make it up."

"You don't understand!" he repeats. "These are rahbits. They multiply."

I still didn't get it—at first. Then it hit me like a ton of bricks! I didn't need the doc's explanation, hut he gave it anyway.

"These rabbits are immortal," he says desperately. "Every three months each one will give birth to an average of six more immortal rahbits. Each of those will grow up and do the same. Nothing can kill them. They'll live forever. Rahbit fever won't kill them, because they are constantly loaded with penicillin by the mold germs in them. Old age won't get them, because they will keep growing. In ten years there will be millions of them, and some of them will be as big as dogs. They'll eat everything in sight, then they'll turn carnivorous. In fifty years they'll cover the whole world. In a century there won't be anything alive except immortal rahbits. The last man on earth will go down under an avalanche of half starved rahbits as big as elephants!"

He practically screeched this last. Then he stood tottering on his skinny legs for a minute, hreathing very loud out of his mouth.

I CAUGHT him when he fell over. I lowered him gently to the floor, not realizing how bad off he was.

"Tell them," he said in a hoarse whisper. "Warn them before it's too late. Now those rabbits can be hunted down and shot. The safety of mankind depends on it."

With that he gasped. His breathing rattled like thunder. Then all of a sudden he stiffened and a deep groan came out of his chest.

I realized he was dead. It was the first guy that had ever died in my arms. I had seen Smokey Jacobs shot in the Hotcha night club two years before, but it wasn't personal, like this.

I laid him on the bed and ran all the way back to town to get the doctor. When I got back with him I ran to the nearest farmhouse and woke up the farmer and told him about the rabbits.

His wife started calling neighbors while he got down his rifle and started to get dressed. It got light about four thirty. By that time all the farmers for miles around were driving up into his barnyard.

It made me feel important when the farmer introduced me as Dr. Baker, and made me get up on a chopping block to explain about the rabbits.

I explained how we had made the rabbits immortal and they would multiply. While I was getting them worked up to the point where they would see that they had to shoot every rabbit for miles around I was thinking in the back of my mind that maybe I had missed my calling. Maybe I should have been a barker.

About that time another car drove up.

"Howdy, sheriff," several of the farmers says to him.

"Howdy," he says, his eyes boring through me.

I try to keep on talking, but my

mouth gets awful dry all of a sudden. The sheriff walks slowly toward where I'm standing on the chopping block.

"He's explaining about the rabbits," one of the farmers says in a loud whisper.

The sheriff doesn't say anything. He just keeps looking at me. And I keep talking, only I don't even know what I'm saying, for sure, any more.

THE sheriff puts his hands in his pockets and listens, his eyes boring into me. I finally stop talking from sheer exhaustion and step down.

"Aren't you Lefty Baker?" the sheriff asks, sort of quiet.

"Doctor Baker," I says, trying to sound calm.

"Sure! I know you," the sheriff says with a short laugh. "Got a picture of you from upstate. You escaped from the insane asylum up there a little while ago. Dr. Winters' son wrote me and told me about it, too. Said his paw might come down to the summer cabin. The two of you escaped together. Immortal rabbits! Well I'll be damned. Crazy people can think of some of the craziest things!"

"But I tell you it's the truth!" I yelled. "You've GOT to believe me."

Nobody was listening to me. The farmers were getting madder by the minute. They started yelling at the farmer that had called them up in the middle of the night.

The sheriff bawled them out and told them to go on home and milk the cows. They quieted down then, and first one and then another got into his car and drove away.

I had been inching toward the corner of the barn. The sheriff turned his head for a second, and I scrambled. The last I heard, one of the farmers yelled, "There he goes!" Then I heard a lot of guys laughing their heads

off. They didn't follow me, so I guess they were satisfied to have me get away.

I headed north on the tracks, and after awhile a freight came along. By this time I was feeling okay again. To hell with the yokels. In ten years they would realize I wasn't crazy. I wasn't going to stick around and wait though. With better than four hundred bucks in my pocket I was going to head back to my old haunts. I'd learned my lesson.

I hopped on the freight. It was headed for the city, and I was going to stay there when I got there. Immortal rabbits! Already it was beginning to sound crazy to me. I had an uneasy feeling that maybe it might turn out like the doc said it would. But what the hell! From now on I keep my mouth shut. Nobody'd believe me and I'd just wind up back in Doc Walters' department, with his gimlet eye watching me, and him convinced I was really crazy.

Things might have worked out okay if I had bopped off before the freight got into the yards. I fell asleep though. I didn't wake up until a yard dick kicked me in the ribs.

He could have just told me to beat it,

but it seems he is trying for a promotion, and he wants to turn me in for the records. I plead with him as he drags me across the tracks. Then I offer him a hundred bucks to let me go.

I pull out my roll and peel off a hundred to cinch the deal. He just laughs at me and takes the whole thing. Then he conks me.

I came to in the wagon on the way to the station. My head aches, and I feel blue about losing my wad. There's a cop sitting in the wagon with me. He sees me wake up.

"Aren't you Lefty Baker?" he asks.

Right then I plan my revenge. I won't tell anybody about the rabbits. Let them send me back to Doc Walters. Let them put me in a back ward. Let them think I'm nuts. In ten years they'll come crawling to me to find out how Doc Walters made the rabbits immortal. When they cover the whole country three deep maybe I'll tell them.

So I leers at the cop and says:

"Sure. Want to make something out of it?" And I enjoy the way he licks his lips nervously and inches away from me.

**STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946
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State of Illinois, County of Cook, ss. Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Arthur T. Pullen, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Amazing Stories and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management and circulation of said publication, as required by the act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations), printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the name and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher, William B. Eif, 345 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; Editor, Raymond A. Palmer, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; Managing Editor, Wm. L. Hamling, 165 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; Business Manager, A. T. Pullen, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill. 2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) 345 Davis Publishing Company, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; William B. Eif, 345 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; E. G. Davis, 355 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; A. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; B. Davis, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) Modern Woodmen of America, Rock Island, Ill. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the full name of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, if given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affirmant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, bond stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affirmant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semi-weekly, and tri-weekly newspapers only.) ARTHUR T. PULLEN, Business Manager, Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of September, 1948, [SEAL] EVELYN RYLIKA. (My commission expires April 24, 1950.)

LUNAR LEGACY

By Charles Recour

Somewhere on the Moon there was a source of radioactives that meant the greatest fortune in the solar system—if it could be reached!

YOUR papers, sir?" the guard asked politely. Quickly he skimmed through them. "Everything's in order. Your luggage has been inspected. Your room is number seven, sir." The guard was feeling conversational. "Is this your first trip, sir?"

A smile crossed young Dr. Ran Stevens' face. He shrugged good-

humoredly.

"You might call it that," he said, "although I did take a guided tour when I was still at school, about seven years ago."

"You'll find things changed, sir," the guard volunteered. "Old Luna is really civilized now. Why, I—"

"Excuse me," Ran broke in, "but I've got some things to attend to." He

Ran Stevens leunched his body forward in a desperate leap to prevent the firing of the gun



turned and walked up the ramp, leaving the discomfited guard to try his reminiscences on someone else.

As Ran walked up the ramp leading to the cavernous opening in the side of the rocket, he thought of the casualness of the whole thing. And yet for him, this was a thrill. Immersed in laboratory and surrounded by mountains of books, the young physicist had had little time to devote to anything but his chosen work.

All around him, the great activity of a space port was at its height. Rockets were being loaded, both with passengers and freight, and while the Moon was still the only regular objective, Ran could see large craft on the periphery of the field. Without a doubt these were the Martian jobs. Probably in a few years trips to the planets would be as common as Lunar journeys were now. The one practical thing Ran knew about was the vast development work on rocket motors. He had, in fact, something to do with that work itself. Before long, he knew that the liquid-fuel, chemical rocket would be as obsolete as the dodo. Some more work with the basic atomic engines and all Space would be Man's.

Mart Stevens! As Ran entered the exit-port of the Lunar rocket, he could see his broad-shouldered, handsome father's face grinning down at him. He could hear his voice as he spoke to Ran and his mother before he had made the last trip. That was twelve years ago.

"Son," he had said, "in case anything happens, I still want you to go to school. I want you to be a slide-rule pusher, not a rocket-jockey like I am."

Ran's mother broke in quickly to change the course of the conversation, but Ran remembered the gloomy night when his Dad must have known that he wasn't coming back. Ran wasn't too shocked when the Government mes-

sage was received, but he knew that was what had killed his mother. Grief and heartbreak were too much for her. Fortunately the insurance and personal property of his father had been more than enough to see him through school.

Ran entered the rocket, found his small cabin and sat on the edge of the acceleration-bed. He pulled the radiogram from his pocket and read it for the thousandth time. "Dear Dr. Stevens," it began, "we have the honor to inform you that we are the custodians of your late father's delayed will—of extreme interest and importance to you. It was his desire that you call for it and discuss it with us personally. He has provided for passage. Signed—Bradley and Lessing, Attorneys-at-Law."

And so Ran found himself headed for the Moon. As anxious as he had been to start work immediately upon obtaining his doctorate, he knew he could not disregard this last request of his father.

ABRUPTLY Ran's chain of thought was broken. The cabin door opened and through it, stepped a girl. For a moment Ran was nonplussed. She was beautiful, her blond hair setting off a lovely piquant face, her abbreviated costume of shorts and tight-fitting jacket lending further clarity to her charms.

She saw Ran. Then her eyes found the room number on the half-open door.

"I beg your pardon," she apologized in a sweet, low and well-modulated voice. "I thought this was number Eight."

"Perfectly all right, Miss," Ran said arising. "My name's Ran Stevens. Hadn't any idea that beautiful girls liked the Luna-trip." He smiled.

The girl laughed. "This is no novelty for me. I work in Luna City. It's

a rather prosaic job—and life.” She glanced down at her watch. “The warning’ll come soon. I should get to my cabin. Excuse me again.” She turned to leave.

“Don’t think about it,” Ran said, “Miss—”

“My name’s June Crary,” she supplied as she went out.

Not bad! Not bad at all, Ran thought, I’ll have to get to know her a lot better. His masculine impulses weren’t completely smothered under the blanket of scholarship.

In a few moments, the warning buzzer sounded, the inspectors passed through, and a little while later Ran felt the shudder of the rocket as it stood on its jets. In a moment the hand of acceleration tightened, to last for a brief while. Thereafter, until the landing, some ten hours later, the passengers would have the freedom of the vessel.

Ran looked for the girl but she remained confined to her cabin. Ran spent the trip staring through the ports of the rocket and marveling at the thrilling sight and feel of being space-borne. The landing was uneventful. Ran thought: if it’s routine now, imagine what it’ll be when good atomic engines are available instead of liquid-fueled rockets!

He watched the space-suited ground crewmen attach the flexible tunnel to the lock. On the surface of the Moon very little was to be seen. Lunar City was completely underground. It would have been impossible to build such a large structure as a city above ground and still keep it airtight. Only visible were other rocket craft, a few sheds, radio towers and antennas, and a few space-suited technicians whose duty it was to supervise the landing and take-off of the rockets.

Ran and the other passengers were

guided through the flexible tunnel to the reception buildings beneath the crater’s surface. He kept his eye on June Crary but had no opportunity to talk with her. For a while he forgot about her in his astonishment at the changes that had taken place since he had last been here as a boy.

LUNA CITY was a world carved in solid rock. The center of the city was a vast cavity filled with conventional structures much like any city on Earth. Living quarters surrounded this area which was filled with places of business, shops, amusement places and all the distractions of any large city; the only difference was that they were piled on each other in complete confusion.

Ran had to smile to himself when he considered how like a typical frontier city this was. And this was the frontier—the frontier of interplanetary space. The milling crowds around him were from every walk of life. The space-suited miner rubbed elbows with the polished administrator. The girls of joy mingled with the girls who earned their living more conventionally. It was a strange and fascinating tableau and Ran felt a surge of enthusiasm and desire for life that he hadn’t felt for years.

After locating suitable quarters in one of the numerous hotels, he decided that he would waste no time in seeking out the firm of Bradley and Lessing.

Physically the air around him had a peculiar flatness, not unpleasant but sharp and winy. This came from the air-revitalizers. Both chemical and biological plant-forms were used to renew the stale air. The very little that escaped through leakage and through the air-locks was replenished by rocket-freighter loads of liquid oxygen.

In the center of the city, Ran

grabbed an air shuttle, a small helicopter just like on an Earth-city, to his destination.

He entered the offices of Bradley and Lessing. They were not particularly pretentious, because like all establishments on the Moon, utility, not appearance was the primary objective.

He opened the door and walked in. The sight that greeted him made him smile happily. The girl whom he had met on the rocket was calmly sitting at a reception desk in the outer office. She looked up. Surprise crossed her features.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," Ran smiled. "I didn't know you worked here."

"I simply didn't connect Dr. Ran Stevens with our client," June said. "I'll announce you right away."

"No," Ran said, "not until you promise to have dinner with me tonight."

She hesitated, then nodded. "All right, I will. I need a little relaxation after my vacation on Earth. Like all vacationers, I relaxed too heartily." She scribbled her address on a sheet of paper and then ushered him into the inner office.

Ran found himself facing a pleasant-faced, middle-aged man.

"Good to see you Doctor," the man boomed. "Come right in. Lessing is out, but I can explain why you're here." He offered Ran a drink immediately. When they were both seated comfortably, Ran drawing on a cigarette, the senior partner of Bradley and Lessing, began to explain.

"Naturally," he said, "you're curious to find out what your late father's will contained, and you're still more curious to know why we had to drag you to Luna City to explain it. Mart Stevens had absolute faith in us and entrusted his business affairs to our

house. And I think, Doctor, that you can trust us as well. When I tell you the story, you'll understand why I say that.

"Shortly before your father made his last trip *Outside*, he came to us with a rather bizarre story but one which we believe implicitly. The essence of it is that he made a huge strike in natural radioactives, the value of which he dared not even guess at. He did not dare to file a claim for the simple reason that it would have been jumped long before you were in a position to do anything about it. He gave us the location of this claim for safe-keeping—to be given to you now. That's why you're here."

RAN sat silent for a while while the thought percolated through his mind. What Bradley was saying was that he was vastly and independently wealthy contingent only upon his relocating his father's deposit of radioactives.

"There are two courses left for you. You can hire men to locate the deposits according to your father's coded information—" here Bradley tapped an envelope he was toying with against the desk, "—in which case, you'll have a time locating trustworthy agents. Or you can do the job yourself. That is, you locate the deposit. Radio-in a fix, we'll file it, form a company and work it for you. Use your judgment. I think you can trust us in this matter purely in light of the fact that we have kept faith with both you and your father. What do you say?"

Ran's head was spinning. "Frankly," he said, "I'm taken aback by all this. I'm a physicist, not a prospector. But when I think of what the money would enable me to do in the way of a laboratory, there's only one thing I can say."

"I thought you'd feel that way," Bradley said.

"We'll make arrangements," he went on, "to provide you with equipment and a partner who knows Outside work. Two of you should easily be able to locate the claim and verify it with Gelger-Mueller's. But you'll have to be careful. Trust no one outside of your partner. Luna City, like any outpost is filled with the dregs of humanity, scum who'd cut your throat for a plugged credit. Now examine this coded document at your leisure." Bradley handed it to Ran. "Come back in two days, and you'll be set to go. We'll make every provision. You keep in constant touch with us through phone contacts."

Ran took the paper to his hotel and studied it carefully. It gave clear and explicit directions for finding the claim. And it looked like a very simple job. Ran could see now why the paper was dangerous. It was simply coded and anyone could utilize it.

That night he had dinner with June. He took her into his full confidence, convinced of her honesty. She expressed great interest in the project and wished him the greatest luck. All the while he noticed there was a vague smile on her lips as he described the possible dangers of the Outside trip.

The two of them had a delightful evening and eventually Ran deposited June at her small apartment. He returned to his hotel. Whistling happily, for he sensed something more than a casual interest in June, he opened the door to his room and walked in, flicking the light-switch on as he entered.

In the brief instant that he saw, before the blackness of a blow overwhelmed him, he caught a glimpse of an evil bearded face. That instantaneous sight was all he remembered for a half hour.

RAN came to groggily. His head ached and the brilliant light hurt his eyes. He looked around the room. It was a shambles. It had been searched from top to bottom. Ran saw his disarranged clothing. In alarm he felt for the coded paper. It was gone!

Ran made a mad dash for the phone. Quickly he located Bradley at home and told the story.

"My God, man," Bradley shouted. "There's no time to lose. Get dressed and come to this address to once. Your trip starts now. Fortunately we've got most of the stuff at hand. Hurry man, hurry!"

Ran showered, shaved, and cleared his head with a stiff shot of serinol. Hastily he dressed and headed for the place Bradley had named.

The helicopter set him in an industrial section of the city near the retaining walls. Ran could see the metal bulk of an Outside Valve looming in the artificial darkness.

Bradley was waiting for him, along with several men, and a space-suited figure, behind the darkened bubble helmet of which Ran could not distinguish his partner's features.

"Listen," Bradley commanded. "On the Field, is a rocket, a small but efficient job, which your partner will handle. You'll take care of the locating through optical navigation as your father's coded chart implied. Give directions. You'll get there, but move fast. All the necessary equipment has been provided. Immediately upon locating the strike, radio us. Give us an exact fix, carry on an elementary survey and we'll legalize the thing. You have to beat who ever got the paper. I think it'll take them a while to solve the code. So the faster you hurry the better off you'll be. I've supplied arms, a few rifles and pistols, but I hope you don't have to use them."

Ran climbed into the space suit, took a few last minute instructions and headed for the air lock. In a minute he and his partner were through it and the broad panorama of the Lunar City rocket field lay before them. They were whisked out to a waiting rocket, a small, compact little vessel, not large enough for spacial work, but good enough for the short distances on the surface of the Moon. Quickly they got inside, and before Ran could say anything, his partner was at the control board.

With a jerk the rocket was space-borne. Only then, did Ran's accomplice say anything.

"Whew," a feminine voice said through the muffled headphones, "I'm glad that's done."

Ran looked, startled. "What the devil . . ."

"Yes," a girl's voice laughed, "it's me. Miss June Cray at your service. Don't look so shocked, Doctor; I'm a registered pilot. It's a sort of hobby."

"Why didn't they tell me?"

"They probably thought you wouldn't like the idea. But rest assured, Dr. Stevens, I'm quite capable of taking care of myself, especially on a Lunar landscape. Really, you'd be surprised how much I know about it."

"I believe you," Ran said somewhat reluctantly. Then more cheerily, "Oh well, you can't know less about it than I do."

"Don't say that, Doc—"

"Call me 'Ran,'" Ran said.

"All right, Ran, don't say that. Remember you're supposed to tell me where to go."

Ran described the general region to her, almost exactly as it had been down on the paper. "When we reach the area of the broken Peak," he said, "I'll be able to take shots and get our bearings. It shouldn't be hard to locate from

that. And the Geiger-Mueller's will give it to us exactly."

"Just don't get too far off, Ran," June said, "I don't like the idea of being out of the ship and walking around any more than's necessary."

RAN watched the cold and dead Lunar landscape spin away beneath them and at another time he might have been impressed. But not at that moment.

The ship, under the girl's hands, skimmed the Lunar surface at a height of a few hundred meters.

Ran took stock of the ship and was surprised to find it outfitted comfortably in spite of its small size. He particularly noted the automatic rifles and pistols conveniently racked on the rear bulkhead.

"Don't get out of the suit any more than's necessary," June warned. "You can never tell when something's likely to happen. And we only have another hour to go at this rate."

"They're not the most comfortable things on Earth—I mean, the Moon—but they're not so bad at that," Ran submitted.

"Men have lived in them for days at a time," June said, "and thanked God they had them."

"Look!" Ran cried suddenly sometime later. "There's the broken Peak!"

June followed his pointing finger. Sure enough, just on the horizon, the queer rock formation, looking like a broken shaft, lay revealed to their gaze. Ran watched the girl's fingertips play over the controls of the craft. Skillfully and without effort she brought the vessel in a sweeping curve, a pass right over the weird rock formation.

"There's no doubt about it," Ran said, "that's it."

Manipulating the controls, June whipped the little rocket into a neat

glide, fed power to the underjets and set it down neatly.

Selecting equipment, including the guns as well as the transits, Ran and June quickly dashed through the airlock. Laboriously stumbling over the soft pumice ground, Ran selected a site at which to set up his transit. It was the work of few moments. Then taking readings in relation to a cleft in the broken peak rock formation, he soon had arranged their course.

"All we have to do now, June," he confided to the girl, "is to walk about three hundred meters along the line I've plotted. You walk first. I'll tell you when to stop. Then I'll follow."

June did that. Ran came along immediately, set up the transit and took a new shot.

"All right, June. We walk forty more meters straight ahead along this new line. That's the strike site. At least it should be!"

Again they followed the new line. As yet there was no sight of anyone.

"We're going to beat them, whoever it was," Ran said. "In a few minutes I think we can call Bradley."

RAN prodded the pumice at their feet. "Here is where it should be," he said in a puzzled tone. "I don't think I've made a mistake. Yet it looks exactly like the rest of the terrain."

"What about the Geiger-Mueller's?" June asked.

"The coded note said they wouldn't be any good until we got into the strike itself. There must be lead shielding around."

June stepped a little to the front and side of Ran. Suddenly she gave a little cry.

"I'm sinking, Ran! I'm sinking!" Ran turned to her. The pumice-like ground was crumpling like sugar at her feet. Suddenly it gave completely and

with a scream, she vanished from sight, evading Ran's clutching fingers.

Even as he peered into the hole through which June had vanished, he retained presence of mind to call Bradley.

"Bradley, this is Stevens," he said as he selected the right frequency.

"Come in, Stevens," came the answering call.

"We've found the site." Ran rattled off the coordinates of their position. Rapidly he explained what had happened to June. "I'm going down after her. Send police at once, Bradley. I'm afraid that the gang will spot our craft."

Even as Ran sent out the call, his heart sank again, for a second reason. Not far overhead a rocket was circling, considerably larger than the one he and June had used. Well, he thought grimly, they were too late.

He called down to June. There was no answer.

Even with the aid of his light, he could see nothing. The rocket above was preparing to land. He had to get out in a hurry. As he thought, the decision was taken out of his hands. The pumice crumpled further and Ran shot downward.

It was a short fall. Ran felt the breath knocked out of him as he landed but otherwise he was unhurt. "June! June!" he called. Then he saw her. As she fell her helmet must have struck a projecting rock with considerable force. He gathered her unconscious form in his arms, and her eyes started to open.

He saw that her transender pack was a smashed wreck. He placed his helmet against hers, and through simple sound conduction he was able to ask her: "Are you all right, June?" She smiled weakly. "I think so. Wait'll I get up."

Gingerly she managed to stand erect. When he was assured that she was all

right, Ran told her what he had done and what he had seen.

"They'll be on us in a matter of minutes, June. I don't know what their angle is, but they're here. They know the police are coming. They must have picked up my call."

"I think it's pretty simple, Ran," June said. "They'll put a probe to your nervous system and force you to sign over the mine legally. Then they'll block your cortex and you'll never know about this."

"They might try a thing like that—I hadn't thought of it. And to make it worse they've got the original documents."

Ran looked wildly about. Several tunnel openings radiated out to either side of them.

"Quick," he said, shining his light into the cavernous mouth of one. "Let's try and get as far away as we can, before we have to use gunfire."

HOLDING June's hand and carrying a rifle in the other, Ran led the way into one of the radiating tunnels. He could see his portable Geiger-Mueller winking rapidly under the influence of radiation. This mine must be rich in ore! They'd have to be careful not to get an overdose of radiation poisoning.

The light disclosed a simple circular shaft as they walked along, smooth-walled and obviously artificial. Ran noticed that it curved slightly. After walking ten minutes, he stopped and put his helmet against June's.

"I think it's safe to douse the light now. I have a suspicion that they might not be above shooting."

"They'll have a time finding us," June said. "They don't know what tunnel we took."

"No?" Ran said grimly. "We leave nice footprints in this dust."

He could feel June tremble slightly against him. Then he heard a faint crackling in his earphones. He stiffened. June sensed that he was receiving. Evidently they were holding down the power of their transmitter to a minimum.

"Listen, Stevens. We've got you now. We know what tunnel you're in. Meet us and talk sensible business or you'll never walk out of here alive." The voice was slurred and indistinguishable.

"Who are you—and what do you want?" Ran asked calmly.

"Sign over the mine to me—and never mind who I am. Be quick about coming out. Remember the tunnels dead-end themselves. You don't stand a chance."

Ran could catch the barest sight of light just around the curvature of the tunnel. He raised the rifle and squeezed off a shot in that direction. There was a curse over the phone but he doubted whether he had hit anything.

He turned to June. He saw her ten feet in front. Anxiously she beckoned. Ran dashed over. June pointed excitedly to another hole smaller than the tunnel. It was not a dead-end!

"We'll catch them in the rear," he said, "let's go."

They squeezed through the opening and after about twenty meters they found themselves in a tunnel identical to the one they had left. Without hesitation Ran, carrying his rifle at the ready, went forward. Here too despite a slight curvature of the tunnel a spot of light from the central point was visible. Soon they reached the mouth of the tunnel.

Waiting, they watched. A half-dozen figures, space-suited and unidentifiable, were clustered in a group watching the mouth of their former tunnel. With only the barrel of his rifle and June's protruding, Ran said calmly over the

phone: "Drop your weapons and raise your hands. I have you covered."

For a moment the startled figures were paralyzed. Then they acted. They whirled in unison, each seeking the source of the menace.

Ran and June fired, fired as fast as they could press the triggers. It was the first time Ran had ever seen punctured space-suits. Any shot was fatal. The six men tumbled in a grotesque heap of crumpled space-suits, their eyes puffed and glazing. Those who hadn't been killed by the actual shots died simply but horribly of—no air at all.

Ran and June stepped out of the tunnel. They looked at the opening above them. It wouldn't be difficult to climb out. Ran ignored the heap of bodies and walked to the side wall which he could climb out of.

Suddenly his earphones came alive.

"Not so fast! Both of you drop your weapons and don't turn around." Slowly Ran and June obeyed, be through direct command, she through imitation.

"Now raise your hands as high as you're able to." Again they obeyed.

"Now turn around slowly, very slowly."

RAN turned and nearly dropped in his tracks. The man facing them was short and stocky. The sun-shields in his glassite helmet disguised most of his head, but one glimpse was enough.

"Bradley!" Ran said, stunned.

"Yes," the man grinned, "it's Bradley. You fools. Who do you think sent you on this searching party? Who do you think ambushed you? For ten years," he went on, bitterness lacing his voice, "I tried to get Lessing to look into this thing—well, he wouldn't, so I had to wait. But it's borne fruit. Thank God that Lessing was gone when you arrived—although I had more to do

with it than he. Why I ever tied up with that miserable little coward I'll never know. Do you think I'm crazy enough to let something like this slip through my fingers, Stevens?"

"You had me fooled all right," Ran said. "I never imagined that you were the one. I am surprised you waited for me to dig this spot out. Why didn't you do it long before?"

"Because, you fool," Bradley answered, "Lessing knew—and wouldn't let me."

"Where is he now?"

"Having a leisurely vacation on Earth. He'll be surprised when he gets back and finds out that I won't need him at all any more—the stupid fool!" Malevolence radiated from the space-suited figure.

"I might tell you," Bradley said, never letting his gun waver from them an instant, "that you needn't expect the police."

"Well, exactly what do you want me to do?" Ran asked tensely.

"We'll go back to my ship together. I have papers drawn up which you'll sign. I'll see that you're taken care of generously. But I want this property in my name."

"And supposing I refuse to sign," Ran countered.

"I'll kill you both, preparing a statement that you were murdered by this pack of tbugs." Bradley gestured at the fallen bodies. "And you'll have willed the properties to the firm of Bradley and Lessing. Nice, eh?"

"Yes," Ran said, "it looks as if you've got me."

"All right," Bradley sneered, "start climbing out. And don't try to run."

Ran started out of the mine. He had climbed awkwardly only about five feet. Suddenly, in a fantastic leap, he hurled himself from the slanting pitwall to

(Concluded on page 144)



The fat tailor backed away until his back was against the wall. He was fumbling in his pocket . . .

HALF-WAY STREET

By Joseph R. Galt

Fire a gun suddenly in a room, and none of the witnesses will agree as to what happened. But what about the man who got the bullet?

I HAD NEVER imagined that hate could have possessed me to such an extent that it excluded all else. It was like something alive; it warmed me when I was cold, nurtured me when I was hungry. It was a terrible flower which had grown like some cancerous thing, and taken root in my breast.

I sat across from Josie in the little

cafe we had found in that side street, the same cafe which we had agreed none would share with us. They still had the same red and white-checked tablecloths and the bread sticks thrust their pocked heads from the same chipped glass.

I sat across from her and wondered where my love had gone to. Certainly

she hadn't changed. On the contrary, she was lovelier than ever. Tonight she wore a little red beret which perched saucily on the back of her blond, smoothly-lacquered hair. Her eyes which once I described as "pools of innocence in which desire drowned," regarded me with worry showing close to the hazel surfaces.

"Ferdy!" Her voice was level, too level. Usually it trilled my name, or rather it had in the past. I knew that she was angry with me when she used that tone.

I said, "Yes," and let it go at that. If she wanted to make something of my not wanting to talk it was all right with me.

"Ferdy, if you're just going to sit there and be a grouch . . . well! I only came because you said you had something important to see me about."

The worry had disappeared from her eyes. Anger rode herd on any emotion she might have felt toward me.

"I have," I said. I took a sip of the Cbianti and made a face. It tasted like vinegar. I put the glass down so hard a few red drops splashed across the tablecloth. They were like drops of blood. "I have," I continued. "Oh, don't worry. I won't keep you in the dark and give you some fake line about not remembering and that all I wanted to do was see you again. Only I've got to get this thing I have to tell, straight in my mind."

She was still again, her pale face whose lips I had never touched, faintly crimson with lipstick, her cheekbones giving off highlights from the fluorescent above and those wonderful eyes, her best feature, looking deeply into mine.

"I'm going to kill Jerry Havens," I said. Now that I had put the thought in words it didn't seem so hard. I said it again, each word savored, "I-am-go-

ing-to-kill-Jerry-Havens."

She had lifted the glass to her lips as I started to talk. The hand trembled and the wine spilled its crimson down her chin. There wasn't anything funny in it. Her eyes widened in horror, horror took possession of her to such a degree that she forgot the wetness dribbling from the corners of her mouth. Her free hand flew upward and stifled a scream.

"That's right, Josie," I said. "That's why I called you. To tell you this. I don't care whether or not you warn him. In fact I'd rather you did. But I wanted to tell you why I'm going to kill him. Because, Josie, of the thing which he has done, not to me, but to you."

"Ferdy, you're crazy. D'you hear? You're crazy," the words spilled from her in frantic haste. "Jerry hasn't done anything to me. It's your crazy jealousy. Please Ferdy . . ."

"Hush. Let me finish please. Half Moon Street was like heaven to all of us who lived there. Then Havens came. Havens and his shop of temptation. Those bits of silk, the fur jackets, the rings, all like the apple which the serpent offered Eve. And Havens, like a fat slug, waiting on the stoop, his fat, evil face greasy with sweat, those small pig-eyes ravishing with their glances the women who passed.

"None of us had any idea of what he was to do to the street. How could we? Josie! How could any of us tell that the greed of our souls would feed on the trinkets he offered? How could we know that because of him, the others would come, like the Horsemen of the Apocalypse after the war?"

She was half-way to tears.

"Please Ferdy," her voice was a whimper now. She was pleading for the life of her lover. I relished that. "Please. You don't know what you're

saying."

I was getting fed up with hearing those words. My God! Couldn't she contrive a new expression? I was getting disgusted with her now. The game had lost its flavor. I shoved my chair away from the table and half-rose, only to sink back, as she said, "Wait."

HER eyes narrowed now, a strange smile winked on and off on her lips, like a tic under control, so regular was it. My eyes fell to her breasts rising taut against the sleazy material of her dress, rounded blobs of tempting, warm flesh. My mouth was suddenly dry. She saw me stare and pushed them harder against the slick material.

"Yes?" I said and cursed myself for the tremor my voice betrayed.

"You used to love me, Ferdy. You always said so. Love me now, baby?"

I didn't answer right away. I wanted to tell her that it was a good try, but too late. But there was an odd thickness to my throat. I wiped my sweaty palms against the sides of my trousers. No. It was too late to tempt me with the sweet wetness of her mouth, my mind no longer felt the press of her body's curves in mine, my pulses no longer leaped at the thought of her body's movement. I had room in my mind only for the hate I bore Havens.

She must have seen it in my face.

"Get the hell away from me, you . . ." she said. I didn't even care that she had taken my mother's name and wiped it in filth. I wiped the spittle that was her parting gift, from my eyes and left her sitting there.

THE streets, the lights, the people, had a smooth flow of rhythm to them, like a Dale Nichols painting. I passed a couple of youngsters playing marbles on a square of barren dirt that served as a city garden. One of them

rolled the colored circle of glass and when it missed the other marble, he let loose a stream of obscenities.

"Easy, son," I said as I passed them.

He raised bright eyes to mine in a quick, hard look, then got off his knees to retrieve his marble. I continued to walk.

". . . guy's nuts."

The words floated back to me and I smiled. It wasn't the first time I had been called that. I wondered that it had once made me angry. I dropped my right hand into my jacket pocket and caressed the cold steel of the small automatic pistol lying so snugly between the pieces of cloth. I had asked the soldier from whom I'd bought it whether it would work.

"Sure, bud," he'd replied.

Then I asked him what it felt like to kill a man. And the words came staccato-like from his suddenly tight lips:

"I don't know. Maybe I never killed one. Wanta buy it or no?"

I had bought it; it and a clip of bullets that fit neatly into its magazine. I'd know soon whether it worked.

Two streets up and one to the right and I was on the wrong end of Half Moon Street. It was the right end in which to approach murder. For half its length, on both sides of the street, shabby, two-storied frame houses projected their weather-beaten shingle fronts over the littered pavement. It was a poor man's street and only the poor could afford to live there. The air was warm and the women stood about, singly or in small groups, talking over the day's passing. The luxury of the poor, swarms of children, screamed and fought each other in the street. But the women seemed to have no consciousness of them. Yet once in a while one of them would raise her voice in a scream of warning or threat, when a car passed by.

I had been born and raised on this street and knew every inch of it, every odor in it, every good it had. So bad Josie Vlasta been born on it; I passed the run-down cottage she lived in, and saw the dirty, torn curtains drawn across the windows. I looked away, it had brought her to my mind and I wanted nothing to interfere with what was in it just then.

I said, "hello," to one of the groups of women when I passed them. Their faces were angled bits of grey turning to look at me. One of them muttered something and another's strident voice said, "The Homas boy . . . Old lady Homas' kid . . . He's . . ."

I didn't get the rest. For I was half-way down the street and in a new world. There were black holes separating the colorless buildings here. A vile stench arose from the holes, as though of corruption. Garbage littered these lots and the ghost-shapes of animals prowled them. I walked slower. Here was a building not like the rest. It had shutters guarding the windows and I saw faint light steal from the chinks between the slats of one of the upper windows. I had visited this building, once, and had fled it in disgust, my money still clutched tight in my palm. I peered up at the shuttered windows on the second floor and wondered if they were still there.

A car slid to a stop at the curb and three men got out.

One of them turned to the others and asked, "Is this the joint?"

"Yeah," another said. "I been here before. Not bad f'r a deuce."

I walked on as they ran up the short flight of steps. I was on the other side of Half Moon Street now. That building was the dividing line. Jerry Havens had been responsible for its being there.

He had been responsible for the others, too. It had been a street of the

poor before, but of the honest poor. Now sin stuck its head out of every hole, from every tavern, showed in every face I met. These people who lived on this side were poor also. But they weren't that way from circumstances. No. Their poorness stemmed from an unwillingness to work. They'd rather steal or beg for their money. And spend it in the five taverns on the wrong side of the street.

THOSE were my thoughts as I walked to the store Havens owned. There was a black-paint legend across the glass, *Havens' Rummage Shop*. In the window was a conglomeration of fur jackets, trays of rings and trinkets, a few men's coats and suits, some houseware and odds and ends Havens picked up somewhere. For once Havens was not on the narrow, short stoop before the entrance.

I walked in the open door and to the rear. There was no one in the front of the store. I walked past a rack of suits, between another rack, this one with women's apparel, and the long showcase on the right side of the store. For a moment I did not see him and thought Josie had called him. Then his voice came to me from the doorway which led to the small quarters he maintained at the rear of the store.

I walked past the door, kicked it shut, and looked at Havens.

He smiled at me, a pig who smiled like a human. He was wearing a red corduroy jacket, smeared with the remains of a hundred meals. His pants, too tight in the waist, were undone for several inches, revealing none too clean drawers. As usual he needed a shave, and I got a whiff of the body odor he gave off.

"Well. If it isn't Ferdy? How are you, boy?"

I didn't say anything.

He stopped smiling. And sweated a little harder.

"Any-anything I can do for you, Ferdy?" he asked.

"No. Not any more. You did enough for me, Jerry. Now I've come . . ."

"I know, Ferdy. It's about Josie, isn't it? Look boy. You're all wrong about that. That girl's all right. Man! She needs a little dressing up once in a while, don't you think?"

". . . to tell you what I'm going to do for you, Jerry," I continued. "As for Josie, there's nothing she needs any more, I mean from me. She's got you now. That ring she wears, you gave it to her, didn't you? That dress, that's also yours. Got her soul, too, Jerry?"

He began to back away from me, as if he divined my intentions. I followed him. I felt like a hunter stalking a hyena. His hands came up in a suppliant gesture.

"You're talking like a fool, Ferdy," he said. He continued to retreat until his back hit the wall at the rear of the room. "It's all in your mind. Josie paid me for those things."

"Where'd she get the money?" I shot out.

"She worked for it," he said.

"Sure. In that house you own. Why did she want that money, you stink! To get the clothes and jewelry you have here. That's why! She was a good girl. Then she came here. With me. I had to bring her here, and show her to you. You wanted her from that first time you saw her. Well, you got her. And I got you!" My hand came up from my pocket with that.

I thought he'd collapse when he saw the snub-nosed automatic in my hand. His fat body moved slowly along the wall toward a door which I knew led to the outside. The gun followed his body. I saw his eyes narrow, and al-

most heard him think. He had come to a decision. He wasn't going to run. He was going to stay. I felt an unholy glee. It made no difference one way or the other whether he was going to die like a man or like the rat-pig he was. Die he was going to.

He had stopped sweating. He stopped fumbling in his pocket for his handkerchief. Now he began to talk again. I let him.

"Ferdy, let me tell you something. Don't try to pull that trigger. I don't want trouble. I was going to run for it, but hell! I'd only get plugged in the back. So I'm telling you. For your own good, don't try . . . ah!"

It was as good a time as any. My finger tightened on the trigger. There was a loud explosion and a small cloud of oily smoke obscured my view for a second.

WHEN the smoke was dispelled, I saw Jerry still standing. I had missed. He looked down at me and grinned. I put the gun back in my pocket and walked out the door. For all of a sudden I was glad I hadn't killed him. I looked back. He was still grinning down at something on the floor.

Either no one had heard the sound of my gun or if they had, had mistaken it for a car's backfire. Somehow, I felt empty of feeling. I walked down the street to the corner. There was a tavern on the corner and a man and woman passed me on their way into it. The man was saying:

"Nothing like a glass of beer after a day's work."

The woman laughed. It had a gay ring, and I saw her work-worn face for an instant. It held a great, good nature, as if having a glass of beer with her man was the greatest pleasure in life. They saw me look at them, and smiled

in greeting. Someone brushed past me and I realized they had been smiling at the man who joined them. The three disappeared into the tavern.

I heard the sounds of laughter before the door closed it off.

I walked until I came to the cafe where Josie and I had sat an hour before. I looked through the stained window and caught sight of her. She was still sitting at the same table. She looked like she was rooted to it. I walked and sat in a corner and watched her. She didn't look at anyone or anything. Her eyes were focused on the glass in front of her. Suddenly she arose, dropped a coin on the table and started for the door. I turned my head slightly, so that she wouldn't see me. The door closed behind her.

I walked behind her a few feet and close to the stores, so that if she turned for some reason, I could jump into a lobby. But she walked on, her head to the front. Back again to the corner from which I'd just come. And into the same tavern. I followed.

The place was full and I knew by that it was Saturday night. There were six tables set back against the rear wall. Two more along the side wall. There were people sitting at each of them. I looked about for a place where I could watch her, yet remain unobserved. I remembered Jerry's words, "that girl's all right." I was curious as to how right he was.

The bar made a small curve at the back. There were several men shooting dice out of a cup there. I moved in beside them. They paid no attention to me. It was just as well because I wanted to watch Josie without having to talk to anyone.

She stood by the bar and waited for the bartender to come to her. When he did, she ordered a drink, beer. She took a sip, looked over the rim of the

glass into the mirror behind the bar, then took another sip. My attention was suddenly taken by something one of the men beside me said.

"There's that Vlasta girl, Josie. She's a good girl, eh, Stash?"

"Yah," said the one called Stash, a beetle-browed man with a square face and deep blue eyes. I had seen him before but I couldn't recall where. "Yah," he said again. "I make mistake first time I see her. I don't think she work that place and be good girl."

They laughed at that.

"Funny thing," one of them said. "Jerry Havens got her the job. He's a funny guy. He's a bigger slob than Joe, here. Joe wipes the egg spots off his shirt at least. But like I say, that Havens is a funny jerk. Runs that joint of his like it was charity. Hell. He gives half the stuff away."

"Yah," Stash said again. It was obvious that he had a one track mind and that Josie was on that track. "I see her in Vonski's saloon an' I tink she no good. But she slap planty hard. Yah! Planty hard. Ho! I give her ten bucks joost for letting me talk to her 'bout old contry. She good girl. Anyone say no, I fight."

"Take it easy, Stash," the first man said, good-humoredly. "No one's sayin' anything against the girl."

THERE was a tight feeling in my chest. Had I been wrong all the time? Not alone about Havens, but worse, about Josie? I was ashamed to look at her.

"Say!" the one named Joe, said. "What happened to that Homas' kid that she used to run around with?"

I didn't want to hear any more. As I moved away, I heard one of them say:

"I don't know. But the way I see it, the kid pulled his . . ."

The rest was lost as I passed out of

earshot. I averted my head as I passed her. But she seemed so lost in what she was thinking, I don't think she would have seen me anyway.

I wanted air, a place to sit quiet and think. I walked hack down the street. The children had been chased into their homes by their parents. Some few, a little older than the others, hung around the lamppost in the center of the block. The night was warm and though the children were in, their parents still stayed out. I stopped short in my stroll as I caught the fragment of words from the dark of a nearby porch.

"... he says, a ring? Why you need a ring? I tell him my man can't afford something like dat. Havens laugh, dat belly shaking like Jello all the time. I laugh too. So he says, okay, take ring. When man can afford pay come back. But for new frying pan, pay now. I say how much, and he says, ten dollars. I laugh, my belly shake like Jello too. I say, ten dollars! You crazy, you. In Ward's is one dollar. So he get mad an' say, one dollar, I crazy. But Ward's sell one dollar, he give it to me for notin'. Dat Havens, he goot to poor people."

I hurried away. Suddenly I wanted to see Josie again and tell her what a fool I'd been. As though my thought had conjured her up, I saw her walking along the street on the other side. I hurried to cut her off, but just as I reached her, she turned in at the run-down house she and her mother lived in. Something made me go around toward the rear. I passed an open window, just as the light in the room went on. I ducked my head below the sill and peeked over it. Josie and her mother were sitting at the old-fashioned round table, its top covered with an immaculate tablecloth. Her mother regarded Josie through bright, bird-like eyes. She was an old woman, Josie having

come to her late in her years. They were seated so that both their profiles were toward me. Josie looked like she had been crying. I wondered why, but stopped as their voices came to me. Josie was saying, in the language of the old country, the only language her mother spoke or understood:

"Ma. I thought he was crazy, the way he talked. I tried to insult him, may I be forgiven for what I said. But he laughed at me. I even spit in his face and he wiped it off and said he didn't care. Then he walked out. I called Jerry right away to warn him. Thank God Ferdy didn't come there."

"How do you know?" the old lady asked.

"I walked by Jerry's a few minutes ago. He was just coming out of the hack and he saw me looking in the window. He waved to me and shook his head, like as if to say that everything was all right."

"That boy," the old lady said. "Ever since the day he went to *that* place, the one where the bad ones are. It was like yesterday, though it was two years ago. I was watching through the curtains. I saw the whole thing..."

"Please, Ma," Josie said. She turned her face toward me and I ducked instinctively.

"... aye. I saw the whole thing. He came there, looking like he'd stolen something, and ran quick up the stairs. In a few minutes he came running down, like the devil was behind him. And humped into that drunken Stoika, phooie!" She spat at the name. "I saw it, daughter. Stoika grabbed Ferdy, shook him like a cat does a rat, then hit him. He rolled..."

Josie's voice was almost a scream.

"Ma! Please! I know. I know."

Her mother's voice was suddenly gentle.

"You cared for him, eh, daughter

mine?"

I WAS only half listening. I remembered about meeting someone, but what happened after that was a blank. I remembered coming home and my mother crying aloud that I had been in a fight because there was blood on my face. I couldn't figure out where the blood came from.

Once more the words flowed over the sill:

"It gets worse and worse, Ma. Even the kids are starting to call him crazy. Then Jerry got me the job with Vonski. That seemed to set him off altogether. Does he forget that Pa was Vonski's partner in the old days and Jerry knew Vonski owed Pa money? So he made Vonski pay me more than any job would. All I do is wait on trade. But Ferdy thinks, I'm, I'm . . ."

I peeked over the sill and saw she had buried her face miserably in her hands.

I walked away from there, slowly, with dragging feet. There was nothing I could say or do any more. I had already done all the terrible things it is possible for a man to do to the woman he loves. For the first time that night, I thought of my mother. We lived directly across the street from the Vlas-ta's.

I walked in, closing the door behind me, softly. I stared around, seeing the place as though for the first time. There was a green, plush-covered parlor chair, its cover hidden beneath a white bed spread. There were two cane-backed chairs before what had been a folding door which separated the dining and living rooms. I walked into the living room past the imitation walnut dining table and buffet and into the small hall leading to the kitchen. I could hear my mother at some task or other. It was funny, but I couldn't ever remem-

ber the time when my mother's hands were not busily engaged with work of some sort.

She was sitting in the rocker which had once been in the living room, but had gone into the kitchen when my father had bought her the new living room set. She was crocheting something.

Suddenly she looked up at my father's picture, set between two holy images and began speaking to the picture, as if he were present:

"Ten years you are gone, John," she said in the soft tongue of her fathers'. "Ten years tonight, my lover, my husband. I miss you very much, aye, until the day I die. But I must speak to you of our son, tonight, else my heart breaks.

"Tell me what to do. Always, when you were here, you knew what to do, to say. But I am not a man, only a mother. And my heart breaks for our son. He is lost, John. We had our hopes. He has none. We were poor, but we worked hard and did not mind so much. Always there have been good and bad among all people. We raised him to be good. And now I wonder if you did not leave us too soon. He has come to hate all people. Not alone the poor, but all people. Something has happened to him, John. He shouts about Havens. What has he against him? Havens has been like a lord to these poor, giving of everything he has. He thinks Havens brought the 'bad house' to the neighborhood. Has he forgotten it was here before Havens came? He thinks Havens brought the saloons here. No, they came because the pleasures of the poor are simple. And if they take a glass of something too many it is only to forget their misery. Tell me, beloved, what shall I do?"

She neither saw me come in or go out.

I HAD to go back. I had to tell Jerry Havens how wrong I was. And after that, try somehow to square myself with Josie. If it was possible.

I got as far as the building I called the dividing line and stopped. It was not of my desire. It was as if something had placed a screen in front of me. The sweat poured from my face as I strove to get past the line of the building, but I couldn't move. I felt something brush my pants leg and looked down in time to see a stray cur sidle away from me. The moon was bright and the dog was etched in light. I saw the hackle, stiff along his spine. The cur backed away from me, whining softly in fear as he did so. Then he let loose a howl of terror and loped away.

Something was wrong. Terribly wrong.

I turned and walked all the way back to the end of the block. I made a right angle turn, continued to the end of that street, made another right angle turn and still another at the end of that block. The saloon I had gone into stared at me, like a Hallowe'en ghost.

I started to cross the street toward the saloon. This time I was going to go into it with my eyes and ears open. I couldn't get myself to believe I had been so wrong about these people. Not alone Havens. It was plain to me that I had misjudged him. Now I wanted to see about the rest.

But I couldn't get across the street. I was on a half-way street. And I couldn't get to the other half. Why? I had just come from there. I strained, as though I was pushing against something solid. It felt solid. It was like a wall of some invisible material. Like concrete. There was not the slightest give to it.

I looked up and saw Josie coming toward me. I shouted:

"Josie! Josie. It's me, Ferdie. Look."

Either she didn't hear me, or she didn't want to. I couldn't blame her. Once more I began to fight the unseen wall. It was in vain. I turned and began a desperate, crazy race to get back to the other side of the street. I had some mad thought that I was suffering hallucinations. I was panting, sweating from my mad running, when I reached the other side, after going all the way around the block.

It was no use. The barrier was still in front of me. Was I going to have to stay on this side of the street the rest of my life? Was that to be my punishment for trying to kill Havens? I lifted my head to the sky and breathed a prayer for forgiveness.

SUDDENLY, as though in answer to my prayer, there came the sound of a siren. I looked around, trying to place the sound. It was coming this way, I knew. I heard doors slam, and windows open as the sound came closer and closer. Then I saw it, a closed-body affair, a police ambulance. It pulled up before Havens' place.

"Oh, no," I said in horror. "It can't be. I saw him. He was alive. I saw him, God. He was alive!"

Then I looked for Josie. She was gone. But where had she gone? It couldn't be that she had stopped in Jerry's place and had . . .

I rushed against the barrier once more, and this time went on by. It was no longer there.

Already the street was filled with the curious. The children looked with interest at the ambulance, their elders stared with more mature morbidity at the lighted front of Havens' store. I pushed through the mob until I stood in the front row. I looked in and was surprised to see both Jerry and Josie. Jer-

ry had his arm around her shoulder. She was crying bitterly. Then two cops came from the back room. They were carrying something on a stretcher. They brought it out and placed it on the sidewalk. The street light brought out with terrible clarity the features of what lay beneath the cotton blanket. I looked down at a face, a face from the forehead of which blood had run in a thin, crooked stream from a bullet hole high up, near the hair line.

It was an odd face. From the nose up it was the face of an idealist, with

its high-bridged nose and wide, low forehead. The eyes were open. They looked up at the sky, with a glassy look that held an odd something of innocence in them. Below the nose, it was as though the face belonged to another man. The chin was not strong, the lips held a loose expression, and spittle had wet the two-day growth of beard. A thin scar ran along the cheek and disappeared into the long sideburns the face had effected. It was the face of a lost soul.

It was my face.

THE END

LUNAR LEGACY

(Concluded from page 133)

which he was clinging, straight at Bradley. It was such a complete surprise that Bradley's shot, fired by instinct, went wild. Then it was too late. Ran was on him, wrenching the weapon from the man. Bradley let it go too easily.

In a flash he had whipped something from his side. Ran made a lunge to grab his pistol arm. He seized it and the two men struggled across the pit-floor trying to knock each other down. Ran clung firmly to the gun arm. Twice Bradley fired but the bullets went wild.

June circled wildly, trying to get in a blow or shot at Bradley but the combatants were too close to permit it. Ran managed to twist Bradley's arm just as he squeezed the trigger again. Bradley's suit collapsed in a dead heap as the air oozed out of it.

As Bradley collapsed, Ran pinched the two holes that the bullet had made in his suit, thus managing to keep the man alive.

Together June and Ran patched the suit with rubber patching equipment. Then they dragged Bradley out of the

pit.

When Ran reached the ship, he called the patrol and a rocket was soon winging its way over the barren landscape. After tying up Bradley, then, and only then, did he and June indulge in the luxury of removing their space-suits.

"June," Ran said awkwardly, "you look very lovely."

The girl pretended astonishment. "I?" she said. "Oh heavens, no. Wait until I get dressed and cleaned up before you start flipping compliments at me. I've spent more time in a space suit with you than I have at more formal functions." She laughed. "This has been pretty rich for my blood."

"Believe me, June," Ran agreed, "I haven't found it easy going either." But there was a smile on his face as he said, "Do you think you'll like associating with a millionaire?"

"Who knows?" June laughed, "I'll have to know a lot more about him."

"You will!" Ran declared fervently, "you will."

THE END



The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

By ROG PHILLIPS

EVERYWHERE you hear that Science Fiction is growing up, whatever that means. What does it mean? Like most clichés of the sort, it has so many meanings that it's basically meaningless. There are a few it doesn't mean, or shouldn't mean. For example, it's no longer possible to write a story like "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea." It's no longer possible to write a story in which atomic energy and the atom bomb are discovered. That isn't "growing up" but merely shifting of the feet. Certain material has been determined so that what is possible and what is not possible in that material is factual knowledge. Thousands of expert technicians and scientists, expenditure of millions and billions of dollars, have explored certain fields that were unknown in the past. The writer of fiction with his carefully thought out basic picture which SEEMS logical and consistent is, after all, not a thousand scientists, and cannot afford to spend three or four billions of the dollars he gets for the stories he writes to be absolutely sure of his "facts" in unexplored fields.

And unexplored fields are the main material of science fiction. Occasionally a science fiction story can be written which involves nothing not already known, and it owes its appearance in print to some angle or fresh slant, or a new implication of something old. These stories are the rare exception, and most—ninety-nine percent—of truly science-fiction stories must draw their excuse for being written, sold, and read, to some facet of the at-present-unexplored fields, no matter how well they may be written otherwise.

But, and here's the point to this discussion, the moment an author bases a story on some facet of the unexplored, he has done some exploring! His exploration may have been strictly negative in its results. His story may sound great and be accepted today as a sound, well laid story. It may deal with some subject that will not be verifiable directly for a long time to come.

Yet next year it might be considered as full of holes and amateurish. Why? Other authors have dealt with the same material and done a lot of careful thinking on it, and have woven their conclusions into stories which have been published and read in the interim, and some things that seemed sound have been shown to be full of holes. The subject may still be outside the realm of the

verifiable, but hundreds of man-hours of thought have been spent on it in a serious, competent survey of what can be discovered about the subject.

That's where the "growing up" comes in. Back in 1923 the field of science fiction was almost wide open. Almost anything would go, and did.

A few months ago I was down at the Z-D office when a budding author came in. Ray Palmer and I went down to the GS (greasy spoon) and had a cup of coffee with him. He was full of enthusiasm, ambition, and all keyed up about a great idea he had on time travel, that he wanted to weave into a great story. It was the one about divergent worlds in the time stream. Fifteen years ago it would have been great, because it was obviously original with him. But offhand I could remember three stories that dealt with his idea in exactly the same way he wanted to deal with it, and half a dozen that dealt with it from other angles. If he had been the world's best writer otherwise, it is doubtful if he could have written a successful sf story on his idea. Anyway, to attempt it he should have first become acquainted with the works of other authors covering the subject.

Time travel has never been accomplished, so far as is actually known or provable. Yet it is a thoroughly "explored" field of science fiction. To write a story woven into that theme, an author must learn what was accomplished by the dozens of writers who have dealt with it in the past—or he is in danger of never reaching his public with the story he writes.

The proper field of science fiction is the field of the unexplored—BUT in the past twenty odd years a vast field of careful exploration has been built up in that realm. Time travel, space travel, possible forms of life under alien conditions, relationships between humans and alien intelligent life forms, future potentialities of modern trends, possible explanations of the unknown past, potential mutations of the human complex—all have their vast body of sf exploration, so that actually it is coming to the point where it is necessary to learn as much or more of sf as it is of science proper to write a "grown up" science fiction story.

Here's another slant on it. An inventor who just casts his eye up to the ceiling and invents something stands about one chance in fifty thousand of getting it patented, because it has those odds against it not having been patented

before. The modern inventor must hire a good patent lawyer, tell him what he wants to invent, and get all the available material in the patent office on it. Then he can hastily study that material and not repeat—and especially not duplicate someone else's work.

The odds are growing continually against a "new" idea in science fiction being actually new, or a new slant on an old idea being actually a new slant. The sf author must be thoroughly familiar with the field. Even then he cannot possibly read all the stories coming out, and all those written in the past, so the more stories he writes the more certain it is that he will eventually write a story that duplicates very closely some other author's story.

That is the risk an author takes every time he writes a story. It is especially hazardous, since some other author may at the very moment he is writing the same story he is, and there is no way of knowing. Nothing is more heartbreaking than to get an idea you KNOW is new, spend a few weeks writing the story—and pick up a sfzine on the news stand and sit down to a cup of coffee before sending the brainchild to the editor, and read your story already in print.

That is one aspect of the "growing up" of sf. The other aspect is the reader's aspect. The main appeal of sf is that sf now has a well developed body of "explored" territory in the unexplored—a territory that is fascinating, gripping, and alive with further potentialities. The host of sf authors, the sf editors of the various prozines, the publishing business that puts out the prozines, the distributors that place them all over the country, and the vast body of regular and not so regular readers that read, think, and comment, all together comprise a vast research organization that is well knit, thoroughly efficient, dynamic, and seriously studious beyond the belief of certain foreign peoples.

Part of this vast research organization is the raft of fanzines that come out, and are reviewed in the CLUB HOUSE. There is, of course, no self-conscious realization of this. Entertainment, and interest are the musts of the whole "organization." A good bit of humor is as important as a good idea that might eventually be "adopted" by the General Electric research organization and be incorporated into a gadget.

No one will ever really know how much of pre-World-War-II sf was actually prophetic and how much of it was actually the cradle of war technology. In many instances, we all KNOW that the ideas used were BORN in the pages of a pulp magazine. In others we suspect it. Today in scientific books and journals you can find things which are the final development of ideas gleaned from the pages of the prozines of the past, or derived from such ideas.

Every month of the year in all the prozines are dozens of new ideas, new slants, new angles, new theories. They are not crackpot, regardless of what some readers often think. The crackpot

ideas wind up in the scrap heap, usually. They are the gleanings from the body of stories submitted to the editors, and the total of stories written is perhaps three times the total that see print.

A few hundred authors, a dozen or so editors, a few thousand men in the printing industry, a few thousand in the distribution industry, and probably half a million readers at the very least, not to mention the two thousand or so active fans, have made science fiction "grow up," and though it has its counterpart in England, Canada, Australia, and other places, it is primarily American, and just as integral a part of our vast technology, science, and research as is Oak Ridge and the telescope at Palomar. It is something we and our allies have that the Russians can't steal. It did its share in the last war, and is even now doing its share—and more—to ensure that we win the next, if next there be. Don't let it go to your head—but DON'T EVER FORGET IT!

* * *

A form letter sent out by the chairman of the Convention Committee speaks for itself, and so is included here as is. Let's all get behind them in forty-nine!

* * *

About a year from now, if things go right, you'll be, I hope, heading for Cincinnati and the Seventh World Science Fiction Convention. Already a surprising amount of enthusiasm has been worked up about this convention, and if we can hold that level of enthusiasm, it begins to look as if this convention might really be above the average a bit.

There have been a number of suggestions made by Ohio fans, in an attempt to provide new and interesting things for the benefit of attending fans. It has been suggested, for instance, that a sort of special market be established, and that part of one day be devoted to the sale or auction of articles for the fans. If you have something you want to sell, bring it, and you'll get what it's auctioned for, minus a small fee for commission. This auction would be quite distinct from the usual auction of donated covers and illustrations.

Also, a sort of competitive entertainment has been suggested. When Cincinnati was chosen for the 1949 convention at Toronto, Detroit asked to be given part of the convention time, promising to provide entertainment for that period. It seemed like a good idea at the time; it seemed like a better idea as time passed. But why limit this to Detroit? Why not ask Philadelphia to provide an hour or two of entertainment? Why not Los Angeles or New York?

Then, the small number of pieces offered at the Torcon auction gave rise to another thought. If the illustrations offered by the sf mags are too few, why not try to get some from other mags? An attempt will be made to beg, buy, borrow or steal some of the Bonestells which occasionally appear in *Mechanics Illustrated*, for instance, and we are attempting to contact Vic Hamlin for some Alley Oop originals!

Well, these are some of the suggestions that have already been made, and I expect there will be a lot more made in the twelve months between now and convention time. Some of these ideas will fail to jell, of course, but I just want you to know that the Convention Committee has not been idle and that this next convention will *certainly* have something new to show the fans, perhaps even something worth while.

We have tentatively picked Cincinnati's Hotel Metropole as the place to hold the convention. This hotel is within a block of the town center, and has a fine convention hall capable of seating five hundred if necessary.

So, you see, your Committee hasn't been idle and it looks like we're in for a big time in forty-nine. So you'd better plan to come. And, whether you plan to come or not, better join the CONVENTION COMMITTEE, for you'll want to get the low-down on all that's going on at Fandom's new center. A dollar, as you know, will make you a member and help defray the expenses of holding this latest, and, we hope, best of all Science Fiction Conventions.

Send that dollar to Don Ford, 129 Maple Ave., Sharonville, Ohio. And I'll be seeing you and everybody else on Fountain Square, next September, the 3rd, 4th and 5th.

Charles R. Turner,

Chairman for the Convention Committee.

* * *

CHRONOSCOPE: Vol. 1, No. 1; Autumn, 1948; Redd Boggs, 2215 Benjamin St., N.E., Minneapolis 18, Minn.; 15c, 2/25c; brings a prominent fan into the CH column. Redd has just been made sec-treas. of F.A.P.A., and has been in the fan publishing game before, so brings plenty of know-how with him. Don Wilson as associate editor, and Bob Stein as art editor, should and does make this a top quality generalzine.

This first issue starts off with an editorial telling how the zine was born. Mention is made several times of "Ron," and I wondered who that was until it penetrated that Ron is the nickname for Chronoscope. A nice poem by Marion Zimmer comes next. Then a nice article by Dr. David H. Keller, M.D., titled "My Five Book Shelf." An interesting theme. What five books would YOU choose to take with you to a desert isle? Personally, I think I'd take four books of matches and an Amazing Stories.

Donna Brazier comes next with a discussion of human nature that's a takeoff from that poem about a centipede which, when asked which leg moves after which, got so confused it couldn't walk. Reminds me of the time some ghoul asked me which foot I started out on when I howl. It was two weeks before I could howl again! Joe Kennedy comes up next with a discussion of pulp covers and why they are what they are. No comment—uh—no comment. Lilith Lorraine takes page 16 with a nice poem. Book reviews by Spencer, Tigrina, and Don Wilson take four and a fraction pages. Then Genevieve K. Stephens gives

with a poem. That makes three of fandom's finest poets in one issue!

Paul H. Klinghief comes up with something called "Introduction to Elliptical Logic" which, so far, says nothing. It may in future installments. Living and Writing Science Fiction by Lilith Lorraine is a very interesting sketch of this famous poet, teacher, and author in her own words.

Winding up in the rear is a scientific treatise by Dr. Arthur H. Rapp, Sp. Ca., Dr. Stf., entitled "Flaming Fans." To quote—"Let us dart forward our sterile forceps, pluck one of these strange denizens of fandom from his magazine-lined burrow, and dissect him on the stage of our microscope. What do we find?" You want to know? Then send Redd Boggs fifteen cents. It's a steal, and you'd better make it eighteen cents or tell him you'll settle for the second issue when it comes out.

QUANTA: Vol. 1, No. 1, 10c, official organ of the Washington (D.C.) Science-Fiction Association, which is rapidly becoming one of the finest fan clubs in the country. Most timely article in the issue is reprinted from the *New York Times* of May 14, 1948, on, on—well—"To support the propaganda of the mighty imperialist war machine, 'Scientific' fiction of America shamelessly threatens with atomic scarecrows," the *Gazette* of Moscow declared. "Hooligans with atomic slingshots—Isn't this the symbol of contemporary imperialism?" That's what Moscow thinks stf is, Wall St. propaganda. V. Bolkhovitinov and V. Zakharchenko should send a dollar to Rog Phillips! All this time stf authors have been undermining the Capitalist System by trying to drain off a few of the filthy American Dollars and that's the thanks they get from their Moscow contemporaries! It's treachery.

Robert Briggs writes an article titled "Science, Sanity, and Science-Fiction" quoting from Alfred Korzybski's book to show fans are feeble minded, schizos, and children. Then Franklin Kerkhof counters with an article proving that only some fans are feeble minded, schizos, and children.

A letter from Louis E. Garner, Jr., prex of the WSFA says that the club has now grown to 23 active members and four associate members. Meetings are held at Room 1030 Transportation Bldg., 17th and H Sts., N.W., Washington, D.C. Start at 8:00 P.M., held on first, third and fifth Sundays each month, all local fan welcome. Interesting programs and talks are planned for the near future.

MACABRE: Vol. 1, No. 2; 10c, Jack Doherty and Don Hutchinson, 68 Latimer Ave., Toronto, Ontario, 34 pages. Joe Schaumburger, Prof. of History at Grubherz University takes top rating with his "The New Settler's Guide to Venusian Politics." Truly a democratic planet. Bumble Bee suffrage is the burning issue of the day there. Another grave political issue is whether the Gardenia Industry should be nationalized—a purely academic issue, since gardenias can't grow on Venus, it says. Oh yeah? I've seen gardenias on many a Venus! Of course I didn't wait to see

if they were growing . . .

A Morgan Botts story by Art Rapp has to do with time travel and collecting fanpups. Les Crouch in "Hodge Podge" proves that Ezekiel has not been equalled yet by modern sf authors. "Animals or Gods," by Keller is not up to the par of this prolific fan author and pro author in many respects, but is nevertheless interesting and well written.

FANTASY-TIMES: 15c, 8/\$1.00; James V. Taurasi 101-02 Northern Blvd., Corona, N.Y.; Sept. '48: the seventh anniversary issue, and sixty-ninth whole number. Will Sykora continues his account of what went on at the Torcon. Dr. Tom Gardner concludes his "1947 in Science Fiction." There is a report on the Whitcon, the British sf convention, held in London on May 15th and 16th, with fifty British fans attending. There are also many very good reports on what is going on in the pro field. One real advantage of taking Fantasy-Times is that it does carry these reports on new magazines and books appearing on the market—often before they make their appearance. A surprising number of magazines do not get complete distribution on the stands, especially new ones brought out by young publishing companies. We cannot, of course, cover them in the Club House, because that would constitute advertising or something. But Fantasy-Times prides itself on not missing even one of these as it appears or before it appears.

I do have to mention one fanzine ad appearing in F-T, though. It shows what is meant to be a gorgeous babe with a come-bither look, and an indifferent male with his eyes on the pages of a zine, with his saying, "Later, honey—can't you see I'm reading SPACEWARP?" Which brings us to that noblezine.

SPACEWARP: 15c, 9/\$1.00; Arthur H. Rapp, 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Mich. It starts off with Art's editorial, titled "Timber!" Wilkie Conner introduces a delightful character, "H. Longhammer, STF Fan., in a four page short story, and H.L.'s girl friend, Betty. (Sometimes I think if Wilkie Conner and Art Rapp would write sf like they write for fanzines they would run hacks like me out of business. I mean that. They can write!) The "Psycho Lab" comes through with a self portrait (word) of a fan Dracula that is quite terrifying in the same way I worry about what's going to happen to Orphan Annie while knowing nothing will happen that will kill her. Bob Farnham under a pseudonym of Arthur Temby James writes a funny skit about a man finally catching the train after it comes to the end of the line. He insists on paying his fare and then tries to get the train to start up again—but where can a train go when it reaches the end of the line? An offtrail yarn, eh, Rapp?

Part eight of the "Great STF Broadcast" is by Radell Nelson and Johnny Mac Karrigan. This classic is really funny. Dan Mulcahy defends God against the attacks of Ben Singer, in "I Object!" I don't agree with Ben's contention that arguments

about religion should not be in fanzines. The existence of God is a valid subject of discussion. It, and the subject of survival after death, must eventually become problems of legitimate science, just as the problem of whether the gods caused thunder and lightning became problems of science and were solved. In fact, I think the only abstract subject that is conceded to be "off grounds" is politics and especially communism. At one time there was a definite move to infiltrate communism into fandom. It failed, thank God, or fandom would today be dynamite to touch. The history of sf fandom is one of the most fascinating subjects I have found. There have even been moves based on the contention that fandom has a special Destiny. None of these moves and trends that have arisen in fandom and been snowed under are any discredit to fandom. They are a credit to its long range good sense and its overall healthy attitude of mind.

FLOOR: 10c, Walter A. Coslet, Box 6, Helena, Mont. Ten pages. I'm at a complete loss to review this, as it seems to be nothing but terse reviews itself, and reviewing a review or a series of reviews—!

KOTAN: Vol. 1, No. 1, Gordon Mack, Jr., Box 138, Lake Arthur, La. A half size fanzine. Co Pederson leads off with a short story titled "The Structure." A poem, "Offering" is by Jon Grodon. There's a two-page poem by Keller—"not to be reprinted without permission." Aw shucks! "Shadow Song" is a poem by Lin Carter. A nice illustration goes with it. The issue winds up with a story, "Last Rocket," by Lester Fried. Altogether it's a nice little zine. Hope No. 2 issue is born.

SPATIUM: August, No. 1, 10c, Harold Cheney, Jr., 584 E. Monroe St., Little Falls, N. Y.; official organ of a newly formed Central New York S-F Society, which starts with five members and a message from its president which says, "This club, I think, fills a long felt need in this area. We don't have very many members at present, but we are sure to get more and more. Incidentally, if any fan in the Utica-Rome area reads this, drop us a line. We have a lot of fun, and discussion is not limited to fantasy, but takes in various subjects of interest to all." The eight page clubzine is an excellent job. Good luck, fellows. Let's hope you get a lot of interesting and active members.

FANTASY REVIEW: 15c, bi-monthly; Aug-Sept., '48; Walter Gillings, 115 Wamstead Park Road, Ilford, Essex. A three page discussion of Charles Fort, with his photo, by Eric Frank Russell, leads off. The rest of the twenty pages contains book reviews and prozine reviews. A printed British zine.

ALEMBIC: Vol. 1, No. 2; Oct., '48; Mr. Ashfield, 27 Woodland Rd., Thornton Heath, Surrey, England; makes its second appearance and is much improved. Regalenth, eight pages. Highlight of the issue is "Contact," by Michael Tealby, an excellent fantasy. (A passing thought just occurred to me. If a fanzine is a fan magazine, what is a fantasy?)

1943 WHITCONZINE: Special issue, published by Kenneth F. Slater, Riverside, South Brink, Wichech, Cambs., England. (I'd hate to be a postman in England!) Contains reports on the Whitcon by O. D. Plumridge, Vincent Clarke, E. C. Tubbs, Norman Hinfield, Charles Duncombe, and Tony Young. With it comes

WHITCON BOOKLET: with a full page of signatures of those at the Whitcon and further reports on the British fan convention. The Whitcon was a great success, and it moves me to comment that if Russia had an interest in such things as fantasy and science fiction—oh, well, there's nothing wrong with this world that a sense of humor couldn't cure. Does anyone know what they have in the way of jokes in Russia? I'd really like to know what they laugh about!

TORCON: A literal who's who of fandom and the Torcon. You have to give those boys in Canada credit—they did a job that may be equaled, but never surpassed. Beak Taylor, Ned McKeown, and their friends are to be congratulated.

CURE FOR ATOM SICKNESS

RECENT scientific discoveries are opening the road toward the prevention and treatment of mankind's newest and most baffling disease. Radiation sickness is a man-made disease sometimes caused in cancer patients who are exposed to too much radium and X-rays. It could also be the cause of millions of horrible deaths when rays from an atom bomb blast pierce the body tissues. The use of a common blue dye called toluidine blue was discovered by Drs. Allen and Jacobson of the University of Chicago. This dye may save the lives of millions of people who manage to survive the initial explosion of an atomic bomb attack, but who often die weeks later from internal hemorrhages because of the inability of the blood to clot. This dye has been injected into the veins of laboratory animals that have been subjected to intense radiations till it took their blood as long as 48 hours to clot. After the injections their blood returned to the normal clotting time of 20 minutes. Neither vitamin K nor blood transfusions prevented hemorrhages in animals used previously in experiments.

Another substance that may prove a life saver in the treatment of people subjected to intense radiation is a chemical compound called Rutin. It is made from green buckwheat. In experiments at Rochester, Minn., Rutin reduced the death rate from irradiation in animals from 64 per cent to 12 per cent by checking internal bleeding.

While these experiments are still in their infancy, the results are encouraging. Until more has been learned, the best treatment for radiation sickness was prescribed by Dr. Warren, head of the first radiological party to enter Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His advice was "rest, food, transfusions, and prayer."

Pete Bogg



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TWO MORE TRANSLATIONS

Sirs:

I hate to disagree with Myrtle Ruth Duke's translation of the words listed above the name of Harry L. Oberg, but find it extremely erroneous so submit herewith a translation I think you will find a bit more accurate, although, perhaps more confusing:

Esti Tamil caj Mages
Tamil is with Kings
Ser tis Banji
To be thus ordained
Calme do mentes
I am of calm mind
Mentes mean tarili
Great minds (they have) slip
Dacarmi so Trjan
Have fear of the things I hold dear
Sies to maj coronarsi
His to be crowned royally
Do mensa peris tremi so gero
Of thoughts of peril we quake within
Egri te medu savir do pordon

Think you to know the halm of pardon?

Prandes heme eplu neste

We are proud of this simple dwelling

Cardeve rendims eten seri ban tor

Have the goodness to do this without rancor.

I might add that I am a personal friend of Dick Shaver and although I receive the club magazine would like to see more of his work in Amazing. (He's got something there . . . or whence cometh the rumor that an august editor is now paying for his "crime" of publishing the truth?)

Bill Nelson,
Hotel Perrine,
Twin Falls, Idaho.

* * *

Sirs:

In your last issue, November 1948, you published a translation of the mysterious words from the manuscript of *I Have Been In The Caves*.

My translation, based on the secret ciphers, is, I believe, a more accurate account of the mysterious words. They seem, to me, to have a certain significance. If what I think they imply is true, perhaps it would be well for all of us to take heed!

My translation is as follows: (Editor's note: See foregoing letter for originals).

It is the High One who calls
Now soon war
Above the mountains
Mountains protect our land
The army goes soon
To fight against meat eaters
The minds of them tremble and they wish to escape
We win over them, the weaklings
We march, we conquer, we destroy their land
Choked, helpless, they will see our might.

John Marshall Purcell
4540 Erie Ave.,
Cincinnati 27, Ohio.

Well, now we've three different translations, and we're more befuddled than ever. Maybe it just proves that our real knowledge of languages is in one heck of a mess!

We want to correct one thing—we were wrong



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In saying the words came from the story "I Have Been In The Caves." They came from Oberg's letter.

This august editor (Mr. Nelson) follows orders, even if he disagrees! Very clever, these devils! But we may have some surprises in store for them, in the near future!—Ed.

THAT THEY DID!

Sirs:

Having enjoyed Alexander Blade's stimulating novel, "The Brain," in your October issue, I shouldn't be surprised if many of our leading psychiatrists found it provocative also.

Lou Huston,
5039 Sunset Blvd.,
Los Angeles 28, Calif.

Yes, Mr. Huston, they did! And further, so did the engineers—who have built a brain now which is a fulfillment of Blade's story on a very frightening scale! The machine mind is truth even before the fiction ink is dry!—Ed.

TAKE A POLL, SHE SAYS!

Sirs:

Take a poll. What better way is there to decide what your public prefers? I am sure you will get a surprising number of most agreeable answers. If you decide to do this please let me start the ball rolling (along with several who have asked for the same thing from time to time) with a plea to reprint Richard Shaver's "I Remember Lemuria."

I enjoy Discussions, but usually end up with my blood boiling. These guys who take such pleasure in panning the great Shaver stories make me sick! What's the matter, readers, his yaras too deep for you? You wanted excitement and adventure and Shaver gives it to you, double plus. I'm here to say Shaver is the best man on the staff with Geir nipping at his heels. If anybody would like to dispute this fact, I am in the right frame of mind to give argument.

I am not one for a lot of "mush," still a story with no "sex appeal" would fall pretty flat. Love has played an important role since time im-

[Turn page]

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In case you didn't already know it, for you who are interested, Carol, Dick Shaver has published his "I Remember Lemmie" in book form, for \$3.00 and his address is Box 74, Rt. 2, Lily Lake, McHenry, Illinois.

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The real question is the Mystery? Do you want it back, readers? It's up to you. We, and Mr. Shaver, have personally continued our investigations. Which ought to scotch the rumor that the deers have gotten after your editor and are sizing his behind with rays!—Ed.

AUTOMATON

By RICHARD CASEY

SOME months ago this magazine published a number of articles on high speed mass production and the development of automatic machinery. It was pointed out at the time in *Fortune* magazine that the world was technologically ripe for another form of industrial revolution—the change from mass production to completely automatic production—eliminating the human element practically completely.

A very recent issue of *Fortune* followed up the earlier story with an amplification of the idea. It was an idea already mentioned in the pages of *Amazing Stories*. And it seems that unfortunately the British have beaten us to the draw.

This issue of *Fortune* describes in elaborate detail monstrous automatic machine hundreds of feet long, designed by a former Hungarian engineer. This machine produces what amounts to a finished radio upon the insertion of practically raw materials into one end.

It is one of the most amazing developments we have ever seen. Some years ago the Hungarian engineer became interested in electronic developments. He noticed that in that science alone could the human faculties be duplicated. He realized that anything done by men could be better done by completely automatic electronic machinery—except thinking.

With the aid of British industry and technicians, he built and put into operation this incredible machine. The main motivation for developing it was the desire to provide the Asiatic peoples with a cheap little radio receiver. Because the living standards of the Asiatics are unfortunately so low, any radio that is hand-made, even by mass production methods, is entirely out of reach of these low-income groups.

Now mass production makes things cheaply. But no matter how far the art goes there is still the necessity for human labor. Since this is costly in the Americas and in Europe, there is a point eventually beyond which production costs cannot be lowered. There is only one answer. Eliminate labor.

And the electronic machine does just this. It produces as an end product an almost finished radio receiver. Nothing needs to be done to this receiver except the insertion of tubes into it and the attachment of the loudspeaker. While at present these last two operations are not yet automatic, they will be eventually. Then the machine will be absolutely, unequivocally, a robot.

Molded plastic plates are fed into the machine at the beginning end—the "mouth." Incidentally, the machine owes its existence to the development of the "printed" circuit, also discussed in this magazine. The molded plastic plates are carried by almost human conveyors past blowtorch nozzles which spray them with vaporized zinc fed into the flame in the form of wire. Thus the plate is completely metallized. Then automatic milling cutters proceed to remove the zinc except for the pre-set parts which will serve as the conductors or the "wiring." The plate is then operated on in a number of ways. Disk "condensers" are attached. Graphite-line resistors are painted automatically on the plate. And all the while, photo-electric "eyes" are inspecting the product and at the first sign of defect or trouble either the part is rejected or the machine is turned off.

Eventually tube sockets are automatically connected to the plate. It is then given a complete



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